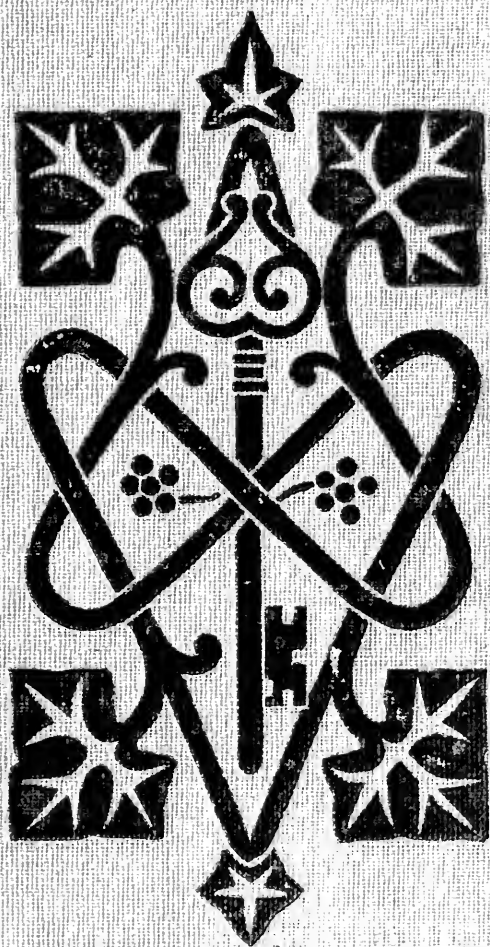


The Fair Maid Of Graystones



Beulah Marie Dix

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THE FAIR MAID OF GRAYSTONES

THE FAIR MAID OF GRAYSTONES

BY

BEULAH MARIE DIX

AUTHOR OF "THE MAKING OF CHRISTOPHER FERRINGHAM,"
"BLOUNT OF BRECKENHOW," ETC., ETC.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE SWEETS OF VICTORY	1
II. OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN	10
III. INTO THE FIRE	22
IV. A STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND	33
V. BY CREDIBLE TESTIMONY	43
VI. VISITED IN PRISON	53
VII. FROM AN ATTIC WINDOW	63
VIII. NIGHT WANDERER	75
IX. EACH TO HIS OWN	84
X. INTERLUDE OF THE PARSON'S PASTY	96
XI. THE UNDER DOG	114
XII. A GUEST UNLOOKED FOR	126
XIII. HIMSELF AGAIN	138
XIV. THE LATTER END OF JOY	150
XV. SPRINGES TO CATCH WOODCOCKS	162
XVI. THEY THAT TELL NO TALES	175
XVII. IN THE PLACE OF DESOLATION	186
XVIII. PASSAGE PERILOUS	199
XIX. TWO AND A BARGAIN	209
XX. MERCY OF THE HEYROUNS	222
XXI. DAY OF RECKONING	235

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXII. THE BREAKING OF THE BRIDECAKE . . .	249
XXIII. AT THE EBB	263
XXIV. A VOICE FROM THE DARK	275
XXV. THE LEAGUE OF THE UNLIKELY	288
XXVI. THE HUMORS OF THE DECEASED HEYROUN . . .	301
XXVII. THE HUMOR OF THE LIVING HETHERINGTON . .	313
XXVIII. BY RIGHT OF HIS WIFE	324
XXIX. THE LAST RETURNING	341

THE FAIR MAID OF GRAYSTONES



THE FAIR MAID OF GRAYSTONES

CHAPTER I

THE SWEETS OF VICTORY

IN the nave of St. Andrew's church two men were mauling each other zealously, while near threescore of tatterdemalions cheered them on. The time was verging toward one o'clock of a breathless August day, and in the church the air was lifeless and heavy with heat. Although the windows, shattered by Roundhead bullets or fanatic stones, gave free passage to whatever breezes were abroad in the town of Colchester, no stir of wind came through. Instead, long shafts of sunlight, tinged blue or red from the glass fragments of angel's robe or martyr's flame that still clung to the ravaged casings, smote full and strong into the heavy dusk of what once had been a holy place.

Not eight and forty hours before St. Andrew's had been a parish church, as it had been for near two centuries, with carven stalls and well-wrought altar screen, with worn old mural tablets, half seen in the gloom of the quiet chancel, and a glory of painted windows that caught and prisoned the colors of the sunlight. Now, sharing the fortunes of the fallen town, St. Andrew's was become a prison. The stalls and the altar screen had been rudely hacked from their place, the windows had been shattered, and the mural tablets, defaced and dishonored, had looked on sordid basenesses alike of victor and of vanquished. Grim sights those ancient tablets had seen in these last hours, and now they looked upon a grimmer sight

than any, — two men, a guard and a prisoner, fighting for very life up and down the echoing nave, even to the foot of the desecrated altar.

The guard was a bull-necked musketeer of the Parliament, with good shoulders, somewhat cramped in action by the close-fitted buff coat that he wore, and a powerful sweep of the arms. The prisoner was a well-knit, slender young trooper of the king, gray-eyed and dark-haired, with a hawklike profile. He had had the foresight, at the outset, to cast off his boots and his doublet, and he fought in light array, exceeding light, to be truthful, for he wore a shirt that hung in rags. In the matter of weight he had the disadvantage, but in the matter of agility he bettered his antagonist by long odds. Both men alike fought with a primitive disregard of rules — gouging, clenching, striking below the belt. They fought to kill or to cripple, and with such charitable end in view their friends tarred them on.

"Lam him, Jock, for Heaven's love!" bawled one dishevelled gentleman, with half a coat to his back.

"Trip up his heels! 'Sprecious, trip up his heels, ye fool!" shouted another, who wore a bloody clout upon his head; while a lad in the rearmost rank, almost weeping because of his inconvenient lack of inches, and pulling himself up perforce by the shoulders of the men in front of him, alternately cursed them and blessed the champion. "Make him smoke for't, Jock!" his high-pitched young voice pierced through the shouting. "We'll learn him to kick a man that's down!"

With no less heartiness the encouragements of the Round-head soldiers on guard rolled out to their comrade, "Smite the Philistine, Faintnot Pedock!"

"Now, now! Press your vantage! You have him on the hip!"

Closer and closer the guards crowded round the combatants. The very sentinel at the door, where the sunlight slanted on

the green turf, had stolen into the hot gloom of the church. Long since the soldiery, angered that even for a moment the ungodly thus should prosper, would have broken in and made a summary end of the fight, had it not been for the sergeant who commanded them. In unregenerate days, ere king and Parliament had gone to hand-grips, this sergeant had been a mighty man to wrestle and buffet at fairs and wakes, and on this hot August noon in St. Andrew's church he was backsliding swiftly. He stood in the foremost rank of the spectators, side by side with the prisoner that had his head in bandages, and with an impartial sweep of his long arms he thrust back all who would have parted the combatants. His eyes were bright, and he licked his lips softly and contentedly, but for very enjoyment he said no word.

Of the threescore and odd men in St. Andrew's church, guards and prisoners, wounded men and whole, but two, for differing reasons, emulated the sergeant by keeping silent. One was a half-stripped prisoner who lay, with face hidden, on the pavement by the southern wall. He had been dying tediously, but comparatively without pain, till a gratuitous kick from the guard called Faintnot Pedock had brought pain, and upon it unconsciousness. The other silent man was Jock himself, the fighter, who had no breath to waste in vain speeches. With nostrils wide, and lips set in a thin line, he fought to guard his own head and to avenge the man that had been kicked. He did not know which one of his half-dozen wounded comrades was the sufferer. He had not stopped to find out. He had seen the kick given; and from that moment he had seen scarlet clouds till he had heard his first blow crash upon the face of the guard.

Now Jock no longer saw scarlet. He saw the brutish face of the man that he meant to kill. He was aware of the streaks of gloom and of powdery sunlight that cut through the church, as he retreated or pressed his advantage up or down the echo-

ing nave. He was aware of the faces and faces about him, and once he saw distinctly, leaping out from the mass, the face of the man with the torn coat, Verney Claybourne, a good friend of his.

"Play him, Jock! Play him!" Verney was bawling. "He's nigh winded!"

Jock did not need to have Verney tell him of a result which he had labored for and now saw achieved. By sight and by hearing he already knew that Faintnot Pedock's breath was failing fast, and he knew that for his own safety this relief came not a moment too soon. He had gained his second wind, but he was tired, almost dizzy with weariness, and deafened with the shouting round him. He was not surprised at this, for he knew that he had not been fitted by the semi-starvation of the past weeks of siege to sustain a long bout at fisticuffs, and if he were to be master of the field, he must end the fight speedily.

At that moment Jock felt against his unbooted heel the slight step that raised the chancel above the nave. He thought to himself that it was a plaguy spot, in which a man was like to stumble, and even in the thought he swerved aside from Pedock's fist, and as he did so, missed his footing. He heard the hissing intake of breath among his friends, the shout of exultation from his enemies, and then, with a wrestler's trick, he had gained his feet three paces at Pedock's right hand.

For an instant the two men fronted each other, Pedock with heaving chest and mouth a-gape, Jock with compressed lips and half-shut eyes, and the men who crowded about the bare strip of pavement, worn with the feet of worshippers, where they fought, fell suddenly silent and watched them, with bodies bent forward and muscles tense, as if they, too, were about to fight that fight. Then Jock fetched a deep breath and forthright hurled himself upon Pedock, much as he had

hurled himself five minutes before at the opening of the fight, when he had seen scarlet. Only now Jock saw dusk and sunlight and Pedock's face, and he struck full and fair for the point of the chin. He struck the man and sent him staggering, as he had done at his first blow, but, not as he had done at first, he sent him crashing backward at his full length.

Jock heard the shouts that rang round him, and he sprang back with fists clenched and body half crouching, ready to receive the bull-like onset when the man should rise. Then he saw that Pedock lay still, stretched on his back, with his head against the slight step that raised the chancel above the nave, and thin streams of blood oozing from his mouth and nostrils.

It was Issachar Pedock, the brother of the fallen man, that first raised the cry, "God 'a' mercy! He has murdered him!" The cry was caught up, tossed back and forth through the empty spaces of the church, echoing from crypt to vaulted roof, and before the first echo had died, came the heavy surge of the soldiery toward the spot where Jock Hetherington stood.

At the same moment all the king's men in St. Andrew's that had two legs to stand on swarmed round their comrade, weaponless, to be sure, but with the potentiality of a pretty fight still in them. For a red moment a pretty fight seemed indeed inevitable, but between the growling soldiers and the loudly defiant prisoners stood the lately backslidden sergeant. "Murder?" he shouted. "Murder a pudding! 'Twas a lovely fight and fair to boot. Convey your brother forth into the air, Issachar Pedock, and hold your silly tongue!"

Then, being an impartial man, the sergeant laid a heavy hand on the nearest and noisiest of the captives, who, as it chanced, was the boy that a little earlier had bewailed himself in the rearmost rank of the spectators. Now, in the shift of positions, finding himself in the front of the battle, he was

shouting defiance at everything in sight, and him the sergeant caught by the scruff of the neck, cuffed ceremoniously, and sent spinning to the wall. "Stand you back, every man of you!" he ordered. "Back, I say! Death o' my soul! Will ye have a dose o' cold lead to share amongst you? Back, or 'twill be the worse for your fighting-cock yonder!"

Sullenly enough, the prisoners broke apart and scattered; some with a selfish and sensible dread of consequences, should the sergeant, true to his word, order the guards to fire upon them; others, among them Verney Claybourne, with a fear of imperilling Jock Hetherington the more by too stubborn a resistance. In little groups and knots they broke away, and while a few of them went to look to the injured man, whose injury had provoked the fight, the rest stood muttering among themselves, with eyes alert for any hostile movement on the part of the guards.

Of all the prisoners Jock was the only one that kept his place in the middle of the nave, and he stayed there, partly, it must be owned, from youthful swagger, and partly from a prudent desire to recover his boots and his doublet, which he had cast off promiscuously at the beginning of the fight. He had found the casting off easy, for boots and doublet were both a size too large for him. Four and twenty hours before, when the fall of the long-besieged town of Colchester had changed his estate from that of a gentleman volunteer of King Charles to that of a prisoner to the Parliament, he had, like most of his comrades, made a forced exchange of garments with his captors, and had had much the worse of the bargain. Still he held that half-worn boots and a ragged doublet were better than none at all, so he prowled down the nave in anxious search of his missing property.

He passed one or two stragglers of the guards who scowled upon him and muttered, but under the eye of the sergeant ventured no more, and to their threats Jock was deaf, and to

their looks blind, and that not altogether from policy. Of a truth his ears still rang with the noise of fighting, and his eyes were dazzled. Strictly attentive to the business in hand, he searched until, by the northern wall of the nave, he found his doublet and his boots strewn along the floor, much as he had left them, beneath a gilded tablet that set forth the virtues of one Dame Eleanor Heyrour. Forthwith he balanced himself on one foot, bracing his shoulders against the wall, and slowly set to drawing on his boots.

There was now comparative peace in the church, though it partook of the nature of the lull between two thunderclaps. Still, the prisoners had dispersed more or less quietly, the guards had returned to their sentry duty by the door or in the open churchyard, and Faintnot Pedock had been carried forth by his white-faced brother and two comrades. The sergeant, following after, profited by the calm to halt beside Jock Hetherington.

"What's your weight, my bully?" he asked.

Jock took up his second boot. "Better than a hundred and sixty pounds, sergeant, when the siege began. 'Tis less now by eight weeks of short commons."

The sergeant eyed him critically. "You're a good man of your hands," he said, "but I could teach you a trick or two would be to your profit. You could 'a' downed him near a minute earlier, had you known how to take your vantage."

"I never was rightly taught," said Jock. "Fighting came to me naturally as a gift o' God."

Slowly the sergeant's eyes began to twinkle. "'Tis a monstrous pity," said he, "that you're a gentleman. If you were but a private trooper —"

"And what then?" asked Jock.

"Why," said the sergeant, "if you were a private soldier and a prisoner now in our hands, you'd never be shipped into Barbadoes or the Venetian state with your fellows in afflic-

tion. You'd find yourself shuffled into my company, and no questions asked of nobody."

"I am bound to you for your good will," said Jock, and then as he took up his doublet, added, "but as long as I am not a private soldier, but a gentleman volunteer, for my sins, what is to become of me?"

Jock asked the question with seeming carelessness, but he felt his heart beat a little quicker while he waited for the answer. For twenty-four hours the gentlemen volunteers had speculated none too pleasurably as to their probable fate, and had vainly sought from the guards some hint that might end their suspense. Always the guards had answered with mockery; but for the moment, at least, the sergeant was pleased with Jock, and consequently told him the truth.

"You gentlemen volunteers?" the sergeant repeated. "Set your mind at rest. You'll soon be clear of the toils. You're to be turned over to General Fairfax's officers, and when you've paid your ransoms, you'll be free to go home — to your mother." He added the last with a grin, for, spite of the haggardness and pallor of Jock's face, he could see, looking closely, that he was little more than a boy.

"Verily!" said Jock, and stopped midway of drawing on his doublet. "So I'm to be turned over to one of Fairfax's officers who thinks to make his profit of my ransom? Truth, he'll be the worst-gulled man in three kingdoms! If you're set on having me in your company, sergeant, you can buy me of my owner at no dear price. Offer him twopence in ransom of me, and you'll find there's none will outbid you." Saying this, he gave his doublet a final savage jerk that carried it up over his shoulders, and looked upon the sergeant challengingly.

More might have passed between them, but at that moment Issachar Pedock came swiftly up the nave and stood at salute at the sergeant's elbow. "Sir," he reported, without looking

at Jock, "my brother's brainpan is broken, and we think him dying."

The sergeant drew a breath like a whistle. "So!" he said, and turning on his heel, went quickly forth into the churchyard.

Issachar Pedock stood fronting Jock, and Jock, with shoulders still braced against the wall, met his eyes squarely. He noted that the scar of an old wound on Pedock's cheek twitched as he spoke, but otherwise the man was deadly quiet.

"You heard what I said?" asked Pedock.

"I have ears," said Jock.

"You have slain my brother."

Jock's eyes never faltered. "I had it in mind so to do," he said, "when I saw him kick a dying man."

For a moment the two studied each other in silence. Then, "You're a good man of your hands and like to go to buffets, it may be?" Pedock asked suddenly.

"It may be," said Jock.

"This cock-a-hoop sergeant of ours goes off duty at six o'clock," Pedock went on with slow emphasis. "'Tis a cousin of mine heads the guard to-night,—a cousin to the man you slew and one that loved him. I shall be here also. And before morning, my trim gentleman, you that like buffets, you will have had enough of buffeting to last you your life long."

CHAPTER II

OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN

AFTER Pedock had walked away, Jock Hetherington still stood leaning against the wall beneath the tablet sacred to the virtues of Dame Heyroun. He kept his eyes bent down and he made a slow business of turning back the sleeve of his doublet, which was too long for him, but in reality he was still seeing Pedock's face.

Faint with long starving and wearied with the exertion of the fight, he looked despairingly toward the future that Pedock's threats held out to him. If he could have seen one ray of hope, he was of as good courage as the next man, but peer where he would, he saw the prospect everywhere dark. He knew that he and his fellows were absolutely at the mercy of their guards. He knew of no way in which he could send an appeal for protection to any one of the commissioned officers among the conquerors, and even had he known a hundred ways, he judged that such an appeal were futile. A friendless and impoverished gentleman, he was but an unmarked straw upon the tide of battle. He might suffer that night the extreme bitterness of pain and shame, and he knew well that not a hand would be lifted either to protect his life or to avenge his death.

It was characteristic of Jock that his mind never held more than one idea at a time. Given such a mind, he frequently attained whither he set out to attain, but, conversely, was as frequently perplexed by the unconsidered consequences that followed on his attainment. For instance, he had seen clearly

the pleasure and the necessity of killing, or at least disabling, Faintnot Pedock, but he had been incapable of seeing till the fight was over the probable disaster that success would bring to him. In the same manner he now fixed his whole mind on the fate that waited for him when the guard should be changed that evening, and became so intent in his musing that he started at the sound of his name.

"That's twice I've spoken to you, Jock," said Verney Claybourne, close beside him. "Come you with me. He's fain to speak with you."

"Who?" Jock questioned, but Verney, without replying, led the way across the church.

The little group of men, gathered by the southern wall of the nave, broke apart with eyes on Jock, and at sight of what their movement disclosed, Jock caught a sharp breath. At his feet lay the injured man, the man for whom he had fought, the man for whom he was in all likelihood to suffer death, and looking upon him, Jock looked upon the face that he hated most in the world, and by the irony of fate the face that in all the world was likeliest to his own. They might have been blood-brothers, those two men. Jock stood upright, and at his feet lay another Jock, older by seven years and much hard living, taller by a couple of inches, broader in the chest, bearded where Jock was clean shaven, long-haired where Jock was clipped after the soldierly Swedish fashion, but still with the same compact, slender figure, the same dark hair, and gray eyes, and hawklike profile.

"It was you, John Hetherington?" Jock questioned slowly. "You? I thought 'twas another." For a moment, in the realization of the thwart trick that fate had served him, he was silent; then his lips curled back from his teeth in a soundless laugh. "'Tis a bitter mistake I have made, cousin," he said, bending toward the injured man. He could see that there still was consciousness in the gray eyes that met

his. "Of your charity hold it but a mistake. You know well that I should be very fain to see you kicked — like a dog."

Something like a feeble twinkle came into the eyes of the elder man. "You always were — frank spoken," he gasped; "you cursed little ruffian!"

The phrase might have been meant either for vituperation or for compliment. The next words surely would have explained it, but there were no next words. John Hetherington's wound was in the chest, and the exertion of even so much speech set him coughing, and the cough filled his mouth with blood.

In the midst of the coughing Jock turned and went back to his place beneath Dame Heyroun's tablet. He sat down on the pavement with his back to the wall, and as he had already adjusted his doublet sleeves, gave his undivided attention, to all outward seeming, to wresting a bit of leather from the worn top of his right boot. Thus he was engaged, when Verney Claybourne, crossing the church once more, came and stood at his side.

"You are busied?" said Verney, with a touch of sarcasm.

"Is he dead?" asked Jock. As his kinsman had said, he was a frank-spoken little ruffian.

"Not yet," Verney answered. "He may live out the night."

"Then let him hold himself happy, for 'tis more than some of us may do. Sure, you do not look for me to weep for him?"

As Jock said the words, there was challenge in his eyes. Brief though his acquaintance with Verney had been, when reckoned by days, those days they had spent as comrades under fire, and in such circumstance acquaintance had quickened to a tacit friendship. Jock approved of Verney, somewhat because Verney had good courage and a generous heart, somewhat — most incongruously — because Verney had com-

manding height and a gracious manner, the two attributes which Jock, himself lacking, in his secret heart most coveted. In fact, after his own reserved fashion, Jock liked Verney more than he liked most men, and he could not bear that now this chosen friend should think ill of him.

After a moment Verney sat down by Jock's side on the flagged pavement. He was a little older than Jock in years, a little younger, perhaps, in hard experience, and bearing that last fact in mind, he spoke less harshly than he had thought to speak. "You seem a generous soul in most matters, Jock. What is there between you and your kinsman Hetherington that you grudge him a kindly word now, when he lies dying?"

"Ask him!" Jock answered.

"And haven't we asked him? Do you think we that have been your comrades, yours and Hetherington's, the last weeks, are without the human grace of curiosity? Haven't we asked him!"

"And what did he say was between us?"

"Truth, he said there was naught. A child's quarrel perhaps, or —"

For the second time Jock laughed. "Naught or everything, as you choose to look upon it," he said. "A child's quarrel, yes." His eyes strayed from the bit of leather he was twisting, passed beyond the disordered nave, beyond the chancel step where Pedock had fallen, to the shattered east window and the quiet sky. "Verney," said Jock, in a gentler voice, "I'm loath that you should think me over-harsh. If aught should befall me, — for we're all here at a sorry pass, you take my meaning, and we know not what the next hour brings, — I should rest easier if I knew that you knew the truth of what lies between my cousin Hetherington and myself. Will you listen?"

"Yes," said Verney, eagerly, and waited, but for a long

minute Jock twisted the bit of leather between his fingers and frowned and was silent. "You were telling me —" hinted Verney.

"After all," Jock resumed, "there is little to tell. I've no pretty ballad story of a ravaged sister or a murdered father. It is a child's tale. I scarce know how to put it into words. I must go back to make you understand even a little, afar off. We Hetheringtons, you must know, then, are the great folk of Daske Forest, that lies in the West Riding, toward the borders of Lancashire. The head of the house is lord of the manors of Broxby and Begdon and Wretham-under-Daske, and he has his seat at a noble old hall nigh to Broxby. He is a very great man in the eyes of his tenants and in his own eyes, greater, I think, than the king himself.

"My father was own brother to Squire Hetherington, the father of the man that is dying yonder, and being a younger brother, was bred to the church. Later they gave him the living of Begdon, where the parson's tithes are never paid, and he married my mother, a gentlewoman of the Lancashire Holcrofts, and begot me. My mother died when I was a tiny lad, and my father married the kitchen wench, a kind soul who bore him many children.

"The tithes, as I say, were never paid, and old Squire's widow — he had been dead some years — offered of her charity to take me to live at the Hall. My father, I think, was glad to be quit of me. So I went to the Hall. It was fourteen years ago. I was rising eight years old, and my cousin yonder was near fifteen. There's little to say. He was a great lad and I was a little lad. I could forget all else — I could forget how he had everything, and I nothing, for that was just, no doubt, since he was the young squire, and I could forget how he was wont to play the bully with me, — 'tis the way of older lads ofttimes, — but my dog I will never forget, and as God sees me, I never will forgive!"

Jock tossed by the bit of leather, and dropping down on one elbow, averted his eyes. "It was a little old spaniel," he said, speaking quickly. "It had been my mother's. I brought it with me to the Hall. I used to huggle it in my arms at night, and it licked my face when I cried for homesickness. One day my cousin struck me, and my dog snapped at him. He beat out its brains with the butt of his fowling-piece."

Verney Claybourne drew a hissing breath. He had dogs of his own.

"When I was a little brat, my mother had taught me to pray to God to make me a good lad," Jock hurried on. "After that I altered my prayer. I used to beg God to make me a tall man that I might kill my cousin John. You see He did not grant my prayer, or maybe, growing faint-hearted, I ceased too soon to pray."

"And that is all that has been between you and your cousin?" Verney asked as Jock paused.

"All that was of moment," Jock answered indifferently. "After a time he went away to Oxford. Then I was happier at the Hall. My aunt suffered me ride the little horse that he had outgrown. I was fourteen when he came back from the university, a fine town gallant. He bade me clean his shoes. I cast them into his face. Then he beat me, but it was for the last time. That night I trudged three league across the moors to my stepmother. My father was dead five years before, thrown from his horse and killed at a cub hunt. My stepmother was married again to a farmer named Elroyd. I walked into their stableyard in the gray of the morning, and told Goodman Elroyd I would clean his horses, hew his wood, anything, if he would not send me back to the Hall. In the end they suffered me bide with the Elroyds, and my stepmother was always kind to me. There's no more to say of my cousin John. He raised a troop at the begin-

ning of the troubles and got him a captaincy. I went out in a Lancashire regiment as a pikeman, and later one of my mother's kinsmen gave me an ensign's commission."

"But you knew each other afterward, when you were in High Germany?" Verney suggested.

Jock laughed. "Captain Hetherington was a gentleman exile, living at his ease with money to squander. His mother starved herself to keep him gallant. And I was a private soldier once more. There was no great likelihood of our consorting, was there?"

"Dick Tevery told me that your cousin balked your chance of a commission with General Wrangel, and 'twas from that sprang your disrelish to him."

Jock shrugged his shoulders. "'Twas another shrewd turn I had to thank my cousin for," he said. "But I told you I had forgiven everything now — everything except my dog. You understand me well."

"Yes," said Verney, and thought that he spoke the truth. As a matter of fact, being midland born, he was a thousand miles from understanding the dour hatred of the northern man.

For a moment there was silence between them. Jock suffered himself to fall back at full length on the pavement, and with arms beneath his head, stared up into the dim, vaulted roof of the church. "Thirteen years I've waited to quit the score that I owe my cousin John," he said half to himself. "'Tis a droll stroke that instead I should come by my death for thrusting into his quarrel."

Verney, who had been lazing with his two elbows propped on the pavement, straightened himself suddenly. "Death? What mean you by that, Jock?" He spent five minutes of hard labor in getting to the bottom of Jock's meaning, but he was no fool, and in Jock's chance sentence he had been given a key to the situation. He got the truth at last of Issa-

char Pedock's threat and Jock's very real peril, and he became grave indeed as he heard the story.

"I had no mind to tell you," muttered Jock.

"The more fool you!" said Verney. "And the more fool I, not to know that something was grievously amiss!"

Verney did not add what he had in mind, that any sane man would have guessed from Jock's telling such intimate matters that he held himself on the verge of a long parting. It was not Jock's practice to unbosom himself on any slight pretext. Having no time to waste, Verney did not stay to explain these deductions to Jock, but rose up and sought Dick Tevery, the noisy gentleman with the bandaged head, and an unshaven gentleman named Will Framlingham, and a coatless, sleepy, and bad-tempered gentleman named Robert Welch.

These four, presently returning, sat down with Jock under Dame Eleanor's gilded tablet and held a council of war. It was a council characteristic of the Cavalier party in that it was noisy, heated, protracted, and came to nothing. Half-way through, Welch discovered from Jock's account what disposition was to be made of the gentlemen volunteers, and forthwith washed his hands of Jock's affairs and went to spread the glad tidings among his fellow-prisoners. Tevery had but one piece of advice to offer, namely, that they should instantly, one and all, assault the guards, by which means, Framlingham was at pains to point out, they would instead of saving Jock reduce themselves to his condition. Framlingham himself, being an astute gentleman, thought that something might be accomplished by bribing somebody with something, and Tevery at that grew in his turn derisive. Who was to be bribed? The sergeant, perhaps? It was likely that he would show marked favor to the prisoner that his mates had singled out for punishment, when already his credit would be tottering for his tacit assent to the fight. And how was he to be bribed, when not a man among them

had a groat wherewith to bless himself? No, the only way was to thrash the guards instantly!

Thus they wrangled, while the sunlight crept higher on the walls of the church, and in the chancel the shadows grew longer and blacker. A faint breath of wind stirred at the casements and at the open door. Evening was coming, with coolness and a hint of peace, even for the weary prisoners in St. Andrew's, but with the evening would come the night guard, and the men who were bent to avenge Faintnot Pedock.

Jock himself had been silent for the last half hour, lying with his head on one hand and his eyes on the pavement. He had taken note that he was resting on the flagstone that covered the grave of Philip Heyroun of Heronswood, who died An. Dom. 1605, and he traced the deep-cut letters with one finger, and ceased all pretence of sharing in the councils of his friends. "Well, if you will not, you will not, a devil run away with you!" he heard Tevery conclude at last, and saw him drive his hands into his breeches pockets. Jock did not trouble himself to ask questions; he knew that his counsellors had reached the same conclusion that he had reached four hours ago, and had judged his case to be hopeless.

The minutes seemed to Jock now to crawl, now to gallop. He saw Tevery rise and pace up and down by the wall, swearing half audibly. He saw Framlingham get up and slip away to the other prisoners. Then when the church was dusking with twilight, he felt Verney touch his arm.

"Jock," said Verney, "I've just come into my estate down in Cambridgeshire. It's near a thousand pounds a year, and I'm thinking even one of Fairfax's officers will not be so notable a griper as to ask it all of me in way of ransom. So if the promise of recompense will avail you with this fry of devils — you know that what I have is yours to serve you."

Jock bit his lip, hardly knowing what to reply, touched and embarrassed, and most unhappy at the unlooked-for offer.

"I thank you, Verney," he said at last. "I doubt, though, if 'twill be of any use. Hark! They're changing the guard now."

Through the open door came the unmistakable sound of clattering accoutrements, and a moment later the tramp of men, gathering among the graves in the churchyard. Jock started to his feet, and at that moment Framlingham returned with two sheepish recruits, one of whom was the boy that had taken so zealous an interest in the fight.

"We'll back you," said Framlingham, savagely. "The rest are too busied wondering if they'll get their rations this night to care what comes of you."

They stood round Jock, the five of them, and waited. Tevery tried to joke, and broke off to swear. The boy had a brilliant and youthful scheme by which Jock might escape through one of the windows. He set it forth at length, and nobody took the trouble to stop him, and Jock indeed grinned at his ineptitudes and thus found solace. But all six men in the group by the tomb of the Heyrouns were alert, and at the same moment all caught the first step of the guards entering the church, and fell silent.

The sergeant who commanded the guard for the night came first, — a wiry, civil, quiet man, who knew his business only too well. Ten of his musketeers he bade line up by the door with their loaded pieces. Four others he bade follow him up the nave, and Issachar Pedock came at his side. Midway of the nave he halted and looked about him. "Gentlemen —" he began gravely.

"I don't like that," muttered Framlingham. "I'd liefer he'd bluster."

"There was a riot amongst you this afternoon," the civil sergeant went on. "The fellow that began it I am going to clap into close confinement."

"Are you?" said Tevery, audibly.

"And moreover," the sergeant ended, "until the culprit is in my hands, no rations will be issued to you. Now, where is he?"

There was a moment of ghastly comprehension on the part of near threescore of hungry men, and in that moment died all hope of active resistance in Jock's behalf. Still, even among the hungry threescore, not one had yet sunk low enough to point out the victim. The sergeant turned perforce to Issachar Pedock. "Find him!" he ordered.

At that, partly to spare his friends a hopeless fight, partly because he was tired of waiting and wished to end it now, with dignity, Jock thrust aside Verney, who stood before him, and walked up to the sergeant. "I'm the man that beat the sentinel," he said.

"Take him," the sergeant ordered his musketeers, who instantly fell in round Jock. "Take him down into the crypt."

Jock heard the little stir and protesting growl of his fellow-prisoners, and from their pity of him he realized the sore strait in which he stood. The crypt to which they were ordering him was deep below St. Andrew's church. Whatever happened there, no sound, no outcry, no plea for mercy could ever reach the outer world. It was to a living grave they were sending him.

"You stark cowards!" he heard Tevery cry. "Will you suffer them take him thus?"

Jock drew a great breath. "Hold your tongue, Dick!" he called. "You can do me no good." He was startled at the sound of his voice, so shaken and husky it came to his ears. Why, he must be afraid, and the thought that he could be afraid frightened him the more. He felt the hand of one of the guards laid on his shoulder, and he needed all his resolution not to struggle, to remember that he must go quietly.

In the same moment Jock realized that he could not yield,

that he could not go down into the crypt. If his courage should fail him there, cut off from his comrades! It were better to be killed that moment in the church, while he still had the strength to bear himself like a man. He halted short, braced for the last struggle, or rather, he found himself and his guards halted, and at that, with an inrush of shame, mastered himself and would have gone on quietly. But when he started forward the guards stopped him, and then he saw that it was not his movement that had halted them.

A man had come in at the open door of the church, a broad-shouldered man, who wore an officer's scarf — so much only could Jock make out in the twilight. He had halted by the door, and the sergeant advanced to him.

"You have the gentlemen volunteers of Lisle's regiment here in your custody?" the stranger asked, and Jock scarcely knew whether to bless or curse him for the moment's respite. "Find me out if John Hetherington, one time a captain in the king's service, is among your prisoners," the officer went on. "'Tis the General's orders that you deliver him at once into my custody."

Jock took one bare second for reflection. Then he lifted his voice. "Sir," he cried, "I am the man you seek. I am John Hetherington."

CHAPTER III

INTO THE FIRE

IN the hush that followed upon his desperate lie, Jock waited to hear a half hundred voices cry aloud a contradiction. He knew the way in which the vaulted roof would echo back the sound, and in anticipation he flinched at the accusing clamor. To his amazement he heard no such uproar, not even one voice, one whisper of refutation. There was a moment — it seemed to him full five minutes — of silence, and then all that happened was that the Roundhead officer, in an unastonished voice, bade, "Bring him hither to the doorway that I may see his face."

Without further prompting Jock stepped from the midst of his guards and halted in the doorway, where the last of the daylight was fading from the church. The officer, standing opposite him, had taken a crumpled paper from his pocket and scanned it from time to time, holding it aslant to catch the light, and then in turn scanned Jock. "Eyes, — complexion, —" he checked the items, and glanced up again. "You've shaved your beard and cut your hair?" he asked.

"Yes," said Jock, in a voice where confidence was growing.

At sober second thought, as far as thought could be sober at such a crisis, he realized that the impulse on which he had claimed his cousin's place was not altogether without sanity. In the haphazard fashion in which, of necessity, matters had been handled in Colchester in the feverish hours that came after the fall of the town, no full record had been made of the names of the gentlemen who had surrendered themselves as

prisoners. Not a guard there present was likely to know that there were two John Hetheringtons in St. Andrew's; not one of the prisoners, even of those who had hesitated to risk their skins or their rations in Jock's behalf, was likely to expose the deception; and Jock's cousin, who alone could have had a personal interest in preventing the imposture, lay in the unconsciousness that precedes death.

Moreover, by a stroke of luck, the Roundhead officer apparently had no personal knowledge of the John Hetherington that he sought. He was identifying his man by the sole aid of a written description, and therein lay Jock's safety. Allowing for the change that the shaving of the beard and the cutting of the hair might work in a man's appearance, Jock was in looks, as far as any offhand description could phrase it, his cousin over again. He saw, then, a gleam of hope — hope that he might for a few hours pass himself off as the ex-Captain Hetherington, Hetherington of Broxby, a man who could pay ransom and, as such, was worthy of considerate treatment. Maybe, before the cheat was detected, he could hit upon some means of escape or, at worst, he might win the Roundhead officer to protect him from the violence of Pedock's fellow-soldiers.

Jock looked anxiously at the officer upon whom his fate depended, and tried to judge what manner of man he might be. To look at, he seemed about thirty years of age, a big, sun-browned, clean-shaven captain of horse, who wore his accoutrements like a soldier of some years' standing. He did not appear to be overblessed with cleverness, which was a distinct advantage for Jock, but he looked as if he might on occasion have some glimmering of humanity. At any rate, Jock would liefer be in his custody than in that of Issachar Pedock, and he would at least win by his desperate shift a temporary escape from St. Andrew's, a few hours' respite, and for what might come after he would plan when it came.

The officer crumpled the paper back into his pocket. "So you are Captain Hetherington," he repeated with eyes on Jock.

"Not a captain now," Jock answered. It was a manifestation of his north-country caution that, when feasible, he preferred to tell the truth rather than to lie. "I served here in Colchester as a gentleman volunteer."

The other cut him short. "No need to quibble, sir. You held a captaincy of the king in the earlier troubles. You came from France three months ago, and landed with a crew of rakehells like yourself near Clegden in Suffolk. You admit it?"

"I don't deny it," said Jock, with a fair assumption of his cousin's insolent manner.

The Roundhead captain turned to the sergeant. "This is the man I seek," he announced. "He goes hence in my custody. I have the General's warrant."

More of the formal business of the transfer Jock might have heard, had he chosen to listen, but he found in the next minutes that he preferred to look. He held that the sight of Issachar Pedock's baffled face was worth all that the captain and the sergeant between them could say, and satisfaction of another sort he found in the glimpse that he had of the dusky corner near Dame Heyroun's tomb, where Tevery, in a vigorous and soundless pantomime, was pounding Framlingham between the shoulders and Verney Claybourne himself seemed inclined to lend a hand.

Jock drew an added sense of relief from the visible relief of his friends, and, very hopeful for the future, followed at the heels of his new captor out into the churchyard. It was a little space of scuffed and trodden turf, with gray stones on either hand and a black yew tree by the northern wall, but to the man that had just been reprieved from the crypt, it seemed a spacious, peaceful, sheltering spot. Westward, above the steep roofs of the town, the sunset glow bathed

the sky with rose and opal light. Jock turned his face thither, and in a half-formed way made good and prudent resolves. He would not jeopardize this, his Heaven-sent chance of escape. He would be meek and circumspect. Whatever orders this Roundhead captain gave him, he would obey. Above all he would not lift his hand against any man, — least of all, against any guard, — as long as life was in him, as long —

At that moment, following as he was bidden, Jock stepped from the churchyard into the narrow street that was overshadowed on the one side by houses and on the other by the churchyard wall, a dirty and ill-favored street, and there by the wall waited three unmounted troopers. The captain glanced at them, and glanced at Jock. "Secure him!" he bade. The three closed on Jock, and Jock, with prudent counsels in his mind and peace and good-will in his heart, hit the first man on the point of the chin and knocked him into the kennel, just as he had knocked Faintnot Pedock.

Beyond doubt this was the briefest and most amazing fight in which Jock had ever engaged, for having knocked his man down, he said, "Name of the Lord!" and stood staring at him in horror. With his hard-won knowledge of the fragility of Puritan skulls, he verily believed that he had killed the fellow, and he looked to see him bleed at nose and mouth as Pedock had bled. While Jock waited, albeit but for an instant, the prostrate man rose up with surprising nimbleness and hit him a cuff in the head that made him see more sunset clouds than ever were in the sky. By the time that Jock was convinced of the glad reality of this guard's being alive, and very much alive, he found himself "secured," as the captain had phrased it, in a workmanlike manner, with his wrists tied behind him.

"There's no need of this," Jock protested. "I'll go quietly whither you are pleased to take me. I'll give you my word of honor —"

"Your word?" the captain answered with an unpleasant laugh. "It's not worth a rush."

Jock opened his mouth to reply with some heat, and then, thinking better of it, kept silent, partly because he realized that it was his cousin's honor that was aspersed, and with the Roundhead captain's estimate of that fragile commodity he was in complete accord, and partly because he realized with a return of sense, that protests would not mend matters.

In silence, then, Jock went whither his guards led him, down the narrow street that skirted the walls of St. Andrew's, where overhead casements were flung back, in the sequel of the scuffle, and dimly seen faces looked forth, through a winding lane or two, along the wide High Street where the waning light was stronger, and so into the paved court of the King's Head Inn, where candlelight flickered from the windows and a savor of cooking, tantalizing to a hungry man, floated from the kitchen door.

For a moment Jock was in terror lest some of the tavern-folk from whom, in the days of the siege, he had after the manner of his kind levied meat and drink, might recognize him and explain to his captors that he was merely a Hetherington, not their Hetherington; but he suffered no such betrayal. Save for one stableboy, who, seeing small likelihood of Jock's hitting back, cursed him fluently but impersonally for a pestilent rogue of a malignant who was like to get his deserts, Jock saw no one of the tavern-folk, and his stay in that danger spot was mercifully brief. Scarcely five minutes from the time that he and his captors entered the court, they were riding forth again on troop-horses that had been waiting in readiness.

Jock was bound into the saddle of the sorriest horse of the five, and his bridle-rein was looped over the saddlebow of one of the troopers, but at least he was turning his back upon St.

Andrew's church. Eagerly he noted each familiar landmark of the High Street, — the Moot-hall, St. Ronwald's church, the green bailey of the Castle, — and began to breathe more freely as he realized that the little squadron was indeed headed for the East Gate. At the gate he had a qualm of apprehension, for there they halted while the Roundhead captain dismounted and colloqued with the officer of the watch. Jock studied their faces in the light of the torch that flared in the dark arch of the gateway, and feared to read in their expression some trace of suspicion, some purpose of remanding him to his old prison, but his fears were groundless. The Roundhead captain swung into his saddle again, the little company followed him through the black gateway, and Jock drew a long sigh of relief as he found himself at last outside of the walls of Colchester.

By the time that they had crossed the river and turned northward by the Ipswich road the sunset glow had faded and the first faint stars were kindled. Across the level fields the trees showed as black masses against a paler sky. The evening breeze was abroad and brought with it the coolness of the wet woods and the distant sea and the odor of ripening fruits and of crisp, autumnal flowers. Jock drank the air with the thirst of a country-bred man who for two months and more had been stived within the four walls of a reeking town. He strained his eyes to get a clearer glimpse of the good, familiar sights of the countryside, — a thatched stack in an open field, an empty wain by the roadside, a herd of cattle that broke apart with tossing horns at the approach of the riders. He listened for all the little noises of the twilight, — the swirr of a bat's wing, the twittering hoot of a barn-owl, the cheep of night insects. He watched the stars that imperceptibly grew brighter, clearer, more numerous. Each moment he saw a half score of new lights twinkle out against the deepening sky, till the sky was black and across

it sparkled the belt of Orion and the long white splendor of the Milky Way.

Thrice the squadron had ridden through little, dark villages, drowsing among spicy hedgerows, beneath the guardianship of their dim parish churches, and twice they had forded, with some splashing, streams where the stars made pale reflections. Beyond the second stream they turned aside from the main travelled road and passed at a slower pace through a darkling reach of close-grown wood. At the farther edge was a gate, which one of the troopers, dismounting, swung wide.

After they had passed through the gate, the Roundhead captain, as if moved by a sudden impulse, pulled up, and when Jock came alongside of him, took his bridle-rein from the trooper that held it, and signing to the man to fall back, rode at Jock's side. "Well," said the captain, and Jock did not fancy his tone, "you begin to recognize the landmarks, perhaps?"

Jock looked at the sky above him, radiant with stars, and at the dark fields that stretched about him, and at the fringe of black wood on his left hand. "How else?" he said at last, since he was expected to say something.

"You know whither we are taking you?"

"I can guess." Jock kept on the windy side of danger.

"And you know who I am?"

Jock writhed in his saddle while he prayed for enlightenment. "I have my suspicions," he admitted at a venture.

The other gave a short laugh. "On my soul, your years of rakehelling haven't killed your homespun caution!" he exclaimed. "I doubt if you know me from the devil. I'll instruct you. I am Lambert Wogan, a brother by marriage to Rafe Heyroun."

"Ah! To Rafe Heyroun!" murmured Jock. With all his

soul he wondered who Rafe Heyroun might be and what were his relations to Captain Hetherington.

"Perhaps you'll say you never heard of the Heyrouns," Lambert Wogan suggested.

"By no means!" Jock urged hastily. "I have heard of them." In that moment his mind reverted to the tomb of the Heyrouns in St. Andrew's church, and he ventured boldly and desperately. "It's the Heyrouns of Heronswood you speak of."

"It is," said Wogan, grimly. "And Philip Heyroun in special you will speak of."

"He's dead," said Jock, with a bewildered recollection of Philip Heyroun's place of sepulchre.

"He is," said Wogan, "and you killed him."

It was unpardonable of Jock, but he was growing dizzy-headed with the accumulation of bewilderments, and at this final charge that he had killed Philip Heyroun who, as the tablet in St. Andrew's bore witness, had been decently interred three and forty years before, he gave a spasmodic gulp of laughter.

Wogan turned on him. "Laugh while you can," he advised. "You may laugh the other side of your face ere you are quit of us."

Jock stopped, choked short in his laughter. Of a sudden, with a chilliness as of cold water trickling down the spine, he had realized that he might not be the only man that had waited for thirteen years to settle an old score with Captain Hetherington. The Heyrouns of Heronswood — the Lord alone knew who or what they were! — had a grudge against the Captain, obviously, and now he, by his own choice, stood in the Captain's place. He tried to stammer a denial of Wogan's charge and stopped, thunderstruck. What might Captain Hetherington not have done to which he, Hetherington's luckless proxy, now stood committed? And to acknowl-

edge that he was not Captain Hetherington was to challenge instant return to St. Andrew's and Issachar Pedock.

Wogan stayed silent till Jock's protest had died in a confusion that to Jock's own ears sounded guilty. "Well," said Wogan, then, "it may comfort you to know that I sent a message this afternoon unto the Heyrouns, to tell them I had good hope to fetch you unto them this night. They're waiting for you in force, yonder at Graystones. And ere you come into their presence I'd counsel you con your tale better." So saying, he tossed Jock's bridle-rein to the nearest trooper and resumed his place at the head of the little column.

The fields had dwindled now to a lane between hedgerows with a dark mass of buildings looming upon the right hand. The mass grew larger, took separate shape and clearer outline. Through the shadow of a towered gatehouse, all overhung with vines, the little cavalcade defiled into a courtyard, where two close-grown yew trees made wedges of blackness in the night that was less black. On the right hand was a wall that must enclose a garden, Jock knew, for he caught the homely scent of thyme and carnation. Before him, across the courtyard, rose the bulk of a great mansion, but in the darkness he could make out no more than the uneven lines of roof upon roof and gable above gable against the background of the starset sky, and looking lower, he could see only the little lights that here and there gleamed in the dark house-front. On the left hand was an indistinct pile of lower buildings, and speedily he found that thither his captors were heading. By a passage, paved with cobblestones and roofed with what must be an overarching story, they entered a great quadrangular court, where stables yawned with black open doors and men with lanterns, troopers and grooms, hurried forward to look to the horses.

In the midst of the confusion of dismounting, Jock found

himself haled unceremoniously from his saddle and, in the custody of one of the grooms, crossing the stable-court toward what must be a wing of the great house. Up one step, where he nearly stumbled, he gained a little porch overgrown with vines, where he was suffered for the moment to halt. Hard by him he grew aware of the deeper darkness of an open door and beyond he sensed that there was space that echoed. Across that black space, each moment nearer, he heard a man's quick step approaching, and he braced himself for whatever might come.

The man set foot upon the porch, a dark, tall figure, only half seen in the shadows. "Briskly, sirrah!" he spoke in a voice of authority to the groom who stood at Jock's elbow. "Run pray Captain Wogan come at his best speed!"

As if by habit of obedience the fellow turned and ran toward the lights that had receded to the stable doorway, and instantly Jock felt the stranger's hand upon his shoulder. The hand touched his neck, and he felt that it was feverishly hot. "Quiet, Hetherington!" muttered a voice at his ear. "Only hold your tongue, and as I live I'll bring you through in safety. You will hold your tongue?"

Jock twisted about quickly and tried to see the speaker's face, but in the dark of the porch all was dark alike. He still was straining his eyes when he heard Wogan's step clang on the cobbles hard at hand. In that moment he felt the stranger's grasp on his shoulder remove and heard him go softly away through the open door into the dark.

No time was granted Jock to puzzle a meaning into the encounter, for next instant Wogan had stepped upon the porch and caught him by the arm. Willy-nilly, he found himself stumbling through the doorway into a wilderness of black passages and empty lobbies. Beyond a turning where a treacherous step almost threw him, he realized that a door stood ajar, for through the crack he could see a thread of

candlelight, and he heard the voices of men, gruff in conversation. For one brief moment Jock thought yearningly of the shelter and comparative safety of the crypt of St. Andrew's; the next moment Wogan had flung the door wide.

CHAPTER IV

A STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND

LIGHTS Jock was aware of, many lights that dazzled him, newly come as he was from the dark, and then as he blinked the dazzle from his eyes, he saw the faces of men. There were five or six of them, he judged, but for the moment he did not individualize them. He realized only that a given number of enemies confronted him, and then in an instant he focussed his attention sharply, for one of the men spoke.

It was a slender, little, old gentleman, who sat at a great table midway of the room. He wore an old-fashioned ruff, and he had reverend white hair and delicate, thin features — a sort of Puritanized saint, in brief. "I pray you, sirs," he said in a dry but courteous voice, "to your seats again! 'Twere better that Captain Hetherington" — he inclined his head toward Jock — "should realize at the outset that he is here among friends."

Jock's heart gave a jump at these words that implied not only that his ruse was undetected, but that there was likelihood of fair treatment for the pseudo-Captain Hetherington, and then, with instinctive caution, he held himself in check. There was no reason, to his knowledge, for any one to have a tenderness to his cousin, the Captain. Warily he measured the white-haired gentleman with his eyes, while he listened to the shift of feet as the men about him reseated themselves. Either the gentleman, for all his saintly aspect, was mocking him, Jock reasoned, or he hoped to get something out of him. In either case, to gain time was the best

that Jock could hope for, so he fronted the gentleman steadily and said nothing.

"I pray you, too, be seated, Captain," bade the old gentleman, with a gesture to a stool that stood opposite him at the table. "And, Lambert, Captain Hetherington will answer questions more freely, perhaps, if his hands are freed."

There was a moment of disapproving inactivity on Captain Wogan's part, and then a rumbling voice cried: "'Wounds, Lambert, are ye turned to stone? Do whatever folly Mr. Inchcome bids. He has the ordering of the matter," and so trailed off sultrily.

Jock shot a quick glance at the speaker, who sat in a chair next to the white-haired Inchcome. He, too, was an old man, past sixty, it would seem, but hale and stalwart, with a gray beard like a bush, and hands clenched on the table before him that suggested sledge hammers.

Beyond doubt the second old gentleman got his way, after his own fashion, as satisfactorily as did courteous Mr. Inchcome. Wogan freed Jock's wrists without a second bidding, and Jock, with a curtly civil "I thank you!" to the two men at the table, sat down opposite them on the designated stool. He was minded to say bluntly, "What would you of me?" but remembering that he stood in his cousin's place, and chafing at the limitations that it laid upon him, he kept to silence as his discreetest course.

At Inchcome's elbow stood a flagon of canary, and in courteous fashion he filled a cup and passed it to Jock, while he asked some trivial questions about the state of the road from Colchester. Jock eyed him sharply. It was plain that the man wanted something of him, and he would not be a pleasant man to deny. That, however, was to be considered later. For the present Jock was thankful for the wine, and thankful for the moment's respite thus granted him in which to take his bearings. He drank slowly and answered Inchcome's

commonplace questions with commonplace answers, while he made a swift and stealthy survey of the room in which he found himself and of the men that surrounded him.

It was a large hall in which he was seated, a very old hall, paved with stone and wainscotted and ceiled in black oak. The windows were few, many-paned, and set so high in the wall that even by daylight the room must needs be gloomy. A staircase with a carved balustrade ascended on the right to an open gallery full of deep shadows, and on the left was a great fireplace of stone, with a coat of arms wrought upon the tall chimney-piece.

On the broad hearth, which was raised a step above the floor, a low fire smouldered, and before the fire stood a clean-shaven man of thirty, with chestnut hair and light blue eyes that blinked, — to look at, a pallid copy of a type of swaggerer that Jock had not expected to find in the Puritan camp. Near by, on a seat built against the wall, somewhat in shadow, a second gentleman of about the same age sat and smoked a long pipe. Because of the shadow Jock could not see his face clearly, but he got an impression that the man was of a dark favor, that he wore mustaches and a tuft of beard, that he had keen eyes, and at that moment, becoming aware that the keen eyes, in their turn, were studying him with dispassionate amusement, Jock carried his scrutiny elsewhere.

He passed over the two men that sat opposite him, Inchcome and the other, and took a hurried glimpse at the right-hand end of the table. He could see that a man was seated there, but a candle stood between them so that he could be sure of but two points, namely, that the man was young and that he wore a parson's bands. Close by him, seated on the table, was a young fellow in the dress of a lieutenant of horse, who, unless appearances were deceitful, was the true-born son of the gentleman with the gray beard, and near this young lieutenant, still disapproving, sat Captain Wogan.

Those seven made the tale of men in the room, and Jock wondered, with a keen appreciation of all it meant to him, if it was one of them that had whispered to him in the dark of the porch, and if so, which one? Could it have been Inchcome, whose friendliness, for whatever purpose put on, had so far won for Jock unexpected courtesy? Jock flashed a look at the reverend old gentleman, and, with a sense of dismay, realized as he met the sharp old eyes, that while he took stock of the other men, Inchcome had been quietly and thoroughly taking stock of him.

Jock set down his cup and leaned forward with his folded arms on the table. "Look you," he said, speaking in blunt contrariety to his cousin's part, "you didn't bring me from Colchester solely to question me touching the roads, did you?"

The gray-bearded man muttered something about "cursed insolence," but Inchcome smiled, a pale and rather wicked smile. "On my word, Captain, you come to the matter in hand at full gallop," he said. "Well, if you are eager to treat of it, hark back in your mind to what befell when you were last here at Graystones."

This was, of course, the last thing that Jock was capable of doing. He answered Inchcome's words with a look of blank unintelligence.

"No doubt," — Inchcome was at pains to explain further, — "you are ready to make the reparation that lies in your power."

"'Twere for the good of your soul," struck in the young parson from his remote end of the table.

"And 'twill be for the detriment of your body if you don't!" growled the gray-bearded man.

Here was a dilemma for a hapless gentleman volunteer! Jock rubbed his hand along the back of his neck, which began to feel hot, while he wondered what wrong it was that he, in

his cousin's place, was called upon to repair. There might even be a woman in the case, — by no means unlikely, where Captain Hetherington was concerned. Jock cast a startled look round the half circle of faces, and in every man saw an injured husband or an injured father or both. All the while he felt that not merely the back of his neck but his whole face was growing hot, and this crimson token of ingenuousness, he judged rightly, would be construed as a shamed admission of guilt. "I don't know what you mean." He blundered out the words in desperation, and realized their banality as he heard them uttered. "What did I do here at Graystones?"

"What did you do!" shouted the lieutenant of horse, furiously, and the same furious demand, though made in silence, came from every man in the room.

Jock felt the tension of the atmosphere and made a wild attempt at general defence. "Whatever I did, sirs, war is a rough game and —"

"War!" thundered the gray-bearded man. "What has war to do with it, you rascally thief?"

To Jock, who had steeled himself to bear much harder names, "thief" seemed at that moment a term of positive endearment. He smiled back at the chafing speaker and said in his own person, with vast relief, "Is that all?"

Afterward, viewing the scene dispassionately, Jock himself admitted that this remark was inopportune, not to say impertinent, and the gray-bearded man, at the moment of its making, had no doubt of the impertinence. He rose up snorting and took an angry turn across the hall. He walked with a staff, for he had a wooden leg, and the staff and the leg tap, tapped on the floor in a grotesque rhythm that for some time thereafter bore a part in Jock's most intimate nightmares.

"Get about your business, Esdras Inchcome," the gray-bearded man flung over his shoulder, as he still paced up and down. "Find out what you seek to know, and find it

speedily, or a fire on me if I do not take the fellow in hand myself!"

With this pleasant prospect before him, Jock faced Inchcome again, and caught a malign amusement in the old gentleman's eyes. "You'd better answer my questions, eh, Captain?" Inchcome asked. "Come, now, what have you done with the little deal box?"

Jock prayed for the floor to open and engulf him, as the one way out of the difficulties that beset him, but as no miracle was wrought in his behalf, he could only say, "What deal box?"

As he had expected, there came a growl from the gray-bearded man, and a curse from the lieutenant, and a groan from the parson. Then Esdras Inchcome, with the tried patience of one dealing with a refractory child, took up the parable. "You have a short memory, Captain, for so young a man. Bethink you! On the night of the seventh of June you went to the chamber of Philip Heyroun —"

"He's dead," said Jock, fretfully; and as he said the words knew the inevitable answer, even before the gray-bearded man snarled, "Thanks to you, you cut-throat!"

Jock subsided, and Inchcome continued: "On the table by Mr. Heyroun's bed stood a little deal box that contained papers. You took that box, and next day when you left Graystones you conveyed it away with you. Now what have you done with that box and its contents?"

There was a moment of silence, appalled on the part of Jock, expectant on the part of his captors. Then Inchcome said quietly, "I trust you did not destroy the papers — for your own sake."

There was that in his quiet tone that made Jock's mouth go dry. "I — I didn't destroy them," he said hastily and truthfully, though not quite in the sense in which the words were taken.

"That's well," said Inchcome, encouragingly. "No doubt now we can clap up a bargain. You have the box, to be sure, Captain, but" — he gave an involuntary chuckle — "you'll observe that we have you. However, do you tell us where we can find our box, let us have it safe in our hands once more, and you shall go hence unransomed and unharmed."

Before Jock had time to grasp the good fortune that awaited the veritable possessor of the deal box, a quiet voice from the fireside ejaculated, "Now renounce me if he shall!" It was the man with the long pipe who spoke. He had not shifted his position nor taken the pipe from his mouth. His eyes, fixed on Jock, were still amused, and because he seemed amused where the rest were angry, Jock distrusted him.

"Hold your peace, Rafe!" cried the gray-bearded man, and Inchcome began a civil protest, and the young parson groaned again.

The quiet man smoked placidly and said, between puffs: "I would not bear Captain Hetherington in hand with false promises. When you are done with him, Mr. Inchcome, I shall, with my brother Lambert's good leave, speak with him at some length."

"In the name of Heaven, what have I done to you?" asked Captain Hetherington's badgered substitute.

"Your idea of humor doesn't commend itself to me," answered the man with the pipe, and having made this cryptic utterance, smoked in silence.

This was the husband, surely, Jock had reverted to his first theory, when the young lieutenant, fuming where he sat, burst out, "And if my brother does not settle the score with you, you cowardly mongrel, I'll do it myself."

Jock turned upon the man of his own profession and spoke in its dialect, "Who a' twenty devils' name are you?"

"The uncle of the child that you near drowned in the horse-trough," came the amazing rejoinder.

There were certain vices of his cousin Hetherington that, even to save his skin, Jock was loath to shoulder. "I did no such thing!" he cried, and felt once more the incriminating hotness in the region of the neck.

The lieutenant promptly denied the denial, and a brisk wrangle seemed imminent, when Inchcome struck in. "Be silent, Phil!" he bade, "and, Rafe, this is no time for private vengeance. I promise Captain Hetherington, and you, Martin Heyroun" — he turned to the gray-bearded man — "pledge your word also that he shall be set free when he gives up the deal box. Now, Captain, do you accept our terms?"

Jock looked to the roof for inspiration, looked to the floor, and up again at the faces that watched him. With the best will in the world he could not materialize a deal box and its unknown papers for the mere ordering, and to explain his inability was to sign his own warrant for recommitment to St. Andrew's. As a last resource, he fenced for time. "Give me till to-morrow to think upon the matter," he begged.

"We'll give you two minutes," Martin Heyroun took the words from Inchcome's mouth.

Jock looked beseechingly from one man to another, as they gathered round the table, but in all the faces read the same decision. He let his eyes drop to the stone floor, and rubbing one hand along the edge of the table, sat waiting. He wondered how many more seconds of the two minutes were left to him, and he wondered how his cousin would have borne himself in the like predicament, and he wondered how and where Martin Heyroun had come by his wooden leg. He marvelled at the slight things he found to think about in that long two minutes, while all the time he strove in vain to bring his mind to work upon the matter that was urgent.

"Your answer, Captain!" Inchcome questioned sharply.

With a start Jock raised his head. The two minutes of grace were ended; the same circle of implacable faces was

round him; and for the life of him he did not know what to say. Of necessity, he spoke the truth, "I can't give you your deal box."

"Can't!" shouted Lieutenant Phil. "You coistril, you mean you won't!"

Half the men, it seemed, came in on that cry, but Martin Heyroun, smiting upon the stone floor with staff and wooden leg, drowned them all with his clamor. "Enough of shilly-shallying!" he cried. "Lambert Wogan, I trust to you. Get the truth out of this knave, if you have to cut it out with a rope's end!"

At that threat Jock started to his feet, and half risen, felt Wogan's hold fasten on his throat. Instinctively he struck one unavailing blow, and then he saw the dark roof of the hall go sliding past him, and Wogan's face against the darkness, and heard a crash, as he landed on his back on the table. He tried to get footing on the slippery floor, tried to pluck away the hands at his throat, and tried in vain. He was being choked to death, and for mere life's sake he made confession. "Ha' done!" he gasped. "I'm not Captain Hetherington."

If it had been a lie, it would have been a vastly clever one. In sheer amazement at this least expected statement, Wogan relaxed his hold, and Jock, rolling out from under his hands, rolled off the table and landed on the floor. There he sat up, still gasping, and refastened his doublet. He thought that his spine was broken, he knew that his windpipe was permanently injured, and with all his heart he longed for St. Andrew's.

An instant's silence had fallen on Jock's surprising announcement, but now Lieutenant Phil burst out laughing. "Now afore me, that lie was well thought on!" he cried.

"As it chances, 'tis the truth," Jock answered wearily. "I am not Captain Hetherington."

"Then who are you?" demanded Wogan, and Martin Heyroun growled a kind of echo. Esdras Inchcome said nothing, but he leaned forward upon the table, and shading his eyes with one hand, studied Jock.

"I'm called John Hetherington, true enough," said Jock. "A cadet of the house, a cousin to your Captain Hetherington. I took his place because if I'd stayed in St. Andrew's — the guards had a grudge against me; they were going to beat me to-night, maybe kill me." As the moment seemed propitious, he rose to his feet. "If it please you, gentlemen," he said with the ghost of a smile, "after all, St. Andrew's likes me better than Graystones. I pray you, send me back to Colchester as speedily as may be."

Again there was a moment of silence, then Esdras Inchcome, unchallenged, took up his rôle of spokesman. "You are a nimble-witted gentleman, sir," he said gravely, "but this desperate shift, I promise you, will not better your position. And as to your identity, proof is not far to seek. Come, Philip Heyroun, you were detained at Graystones in the time of Captain Hetherington's tenancy. Tell us, now, is this man Captain Hetherington?"

At that the chestnut-haired man, who had stood somewhat in the rear, stepped up to Jock at the table. Jock faced him, with the confidence of a man who sees a sure deliverance. "You never set eyes on me in your life, did you, sir?" he said.

The chestnut-haired man called Philip looked at Jock with blinking eyes, surveyed him thoroughly from his worn boots to his dishevelled dark head. Then he turned to Esdras Inchcome. "Why," said he, "what question can be made here? Surely, I should know Captain Hetherington by now, and 'tis Captain Hetherington that stands before you."

CHAPTER V

BY CREDIBLE TESTIMONY

FOR the second time that evening Jock had a discomfortable sensation, as of a bucket of water being dashed down his back. He looked blankly at the chestnut-haired Philip, who returned the scrutiny with blinking eyes; he looked at Esdras Inchcome, who had leaned back in his chair as if relieved of a momentary doubt; he looked at Rafe Heyroun, who for the first time had taken the pipe from his mouth and ceased to seem amused. He had a strange sense of the faces coming back after a moment of mistiness, so clearly and distinctly that they startled him, as if they were new and unexpected apparitions.

"Well?" Inchcome threw the monosyllable into the silence.

"He's lying," said Jock. There was in his tone no robust conviction but weary bewilderment. On an instinct natural to one that had been five years a soldier, he turned from the civilians, who were beyond his comprehension, to the two men that wore buff coats. "You may stand some day where I stand to-night," he said. "Now do me bare justice as you hope for justice then. Sure, others than that fellow yonder saw my cousin when he was at this house. They cannot all find it to their profit to lie as he has done —"

"Do you look for me to swallow this?" demanded Philip.

Jock wheeled upon him. "You dare not front me with other witnesses!" he cried with a vehemence that bore down the other's expostulation.

For a few ensuing moments there was hubbub in the room, while Philip raged at Jock's free use of the verb "to lie," and Jock clamored unappeasably for more witnesses to his identity, and Lieutenant Phil threatened much unpleasantness to Jock if he did not hold his tongue, and Martin Heyroun generously blackguarded every one in sight. As nothing short of a gag was likely to silence Jock, the dispute might have gone on indefinitely, had it not received a new turn from Rafe Heyroun. Still puffing at his pipe, that philosophic gentleman sauntered across the hall, and had sauntered half-way up the stairs, when the chestnut-haired Philip, as if acting on a premonition, turned and spied him.

"Where are you going?" cried Philip, angrily.

"Dear cousin," drawled Rafe, and his well-controlled voice, falling on the clamor, caused a sudden stillness, "keep that tone for Hetherington, and for Hetherington only, you were best. Father," — he turned to Martin Heyroun, — "under your favor, I am going to fetch hither my mother, and Mistress Blanche Mallory, and Althea Lovewell. They were all at Graystones in June, and they will know if this be Captain Hetherington."

"Cousin!" cried the young parson, starting to his feet, and "You doubt my word?" cried Philip, simultaneously.

In the ominous quiet of the hall Rafe answered with a civil little bow, "My good Philip, the best of us may be mistaken," and so, still pulling at his pipe, strolled on up the stairs and vanished among the shadows of the gallery.

But though Rafe Heyroun vanished, his work remained. In open suspicion of one another, the occupants of the hall fell silently into two camps. Martin Heyroun, his son, Lieutenant Phil, and Lambert Wogan drew over to the fire, where they conferred in low voices, while the chestnut-haired Philip stood with the young parson, his brother, it seemed, at the right-hand end of the table, and explained audibly in what

cruel fashion he had been misjudged. Meantime Esdras Inchcome, as one holding to neither party, remained seated in his old place at the table and drank a cup of canary with slow relish.

Jock observed these details with nice exactness, for he was likely to have nothing but details from which to gather the significance of events. Sitting in his old seat, which he had resumed unhindered, he watched the men about him, while he tried to fathom the obscurity of the family intrigue in which he seemed to be involved. Why should this Philip have lied about his identity? And what would be the consequences to him if the lie were not disproved? In spite of himself Jock felt his courage waver as he looked upon his captors. There was no reason, let alone mercy, in any man there, save Inchcome, and Inchcome, with his politic courtesy and unruffled temper, he feared the most of all. He felt a momentary relief as he thought on Rafe Heyroun, who at least had granted him the benefit of the doubt, but next moment, schooled by his experience of Inchcome and of others, he wondered what personal aim Rafe might have in view.

In a corner of the hall, where it was dusky, stood a clock, and Jock's eyes, growing wonted to the lighting of the room, were able to read the dial. It was twenty minutes to eleven. Afar in the shadows of the gallery a door slammed faintly, and then, nearer at hand, a woman's voice spoke, and was silent. Jock rose to his feet, and leaning heavily with one hand on the table, strained his eyes upon the stairway where the witnesses who should save or destroy him must first appear. Round him the men fell silent, and in the silence could be heard in the gallery the sound of footsteps and the rustle of women's garments.

Rafe Heyroun, a tall and dark figure, reappeared upon the staircase, and, in a gallant manner that was good to see, handed his mother down into the hall. She was a little old

gentlewoman, like a very pretty and well-kept doll, with dainty gray ringlets and dainty pink cheeks, and she wore a gown of flowered tabby that rustled about her feet. Behind her, walking slowly and with eyes bent down, was a tall girl of gracious figure, and behind her, again, came an erect and set-faced woman of middle age, at sight of whom, Jock could have sworn, Inchcome suppressed a groan, and Martin Heyroun let slip an audible curse.

"Good Mistress Heyroun," said Inchcome, in a voice like honey, "I am sorry that your rest has been broken thus needlessly."

"Ay, needlessly indeed, Sister Difficult," Martin Heyroun struck in. "This dull business does not concern you."

"And does it not concern me?" asked Difficult Heyroun, in a voice that made Jock thankful that the table was between them. "Am I not sister by marriage to our poor, dead Philip, who I trust is in a better place? Am I not mother to those two innocent boys whom you would rob of their rightful heritage, you and Esdras Inchcome yonder with his empty prate of the law? Bear you both in mind the judgment that the Scriptures denounce on those that go about to despoil the widow and the orphans!"

"Mother! I do entreat you!" here interrupted that lusty orphan, the chestnut-haired Philip.

"Hold your peace!" bade the mother, sweeping down from the staircase. "You are too unworldly, Philip. They will despoil you amongst them." She sat herself down firmly, militantly, on the nearest stool. "For mine own poor part," she said, "I do not quit this room till with mine own eyes I have seen my poor, dead brother's lawful will."

In the dismayed silence that followed Jock felt, for the first time and most surprisingly, that he and the assembled men of the Heyroun family were one in sympathy. Captors and captive, they cowered alike before that resolute gentle-

woman and looked helplessly to one another for support. Inchcome, as usual, manned the breach.

"Good mistress," said he, and coughed, "we have not yet recovered Philip Heyroun's will."

"Why not?" Mistress Difficult Heyroun asked suspiciously. "You have the rogue that stole it. If I were a man, he'd have delivered up that will an hour ago!" She fixed her glance on Jock as she spoke, and Jock paid her the compliment of having not the faintest doubt as to the truth of her last assertion.

Once again Inchcome lifted his voice, though even he found it no easy task to make head against the spate of Mistress Difficult's arguments. Still, he contrived to explain that, before the missing papers could be demanded of the prisoner, a preliminary matter of identification must be gone through with, and he suggested, even he speaking vaguely and afar off, that in this matter Mistress Difficult, with all her aptitude, could be of little service, inasmuch as she had never in her life set eyes on Captain Hetherington.

"What of that?" cried Mistress Difficult. "I've heard my son Philip's description of the villain."

At this rate the dispute might have gone on all night, had the men been left unaided to cope with Mistress Difficult, but luckily the little gentlewoman in the flowered tabby here took a hand. "'Tis bitter hard," she complained, "that I should be summoned hither to no purpose. What would you of me, husband, or was it but another of Rafe's follies?"

Inchcome turned to her with relief. "Do you recognize this man?" he questioned hurriedly.

Before the little gentlewoman could reply, Difficult Heyroun cried sharply, "Recognize? Good lack, Sister Henrietta, how can you look to recognize man or beast — at your age, and you without your spectacles!"

At that the little gentlewoman flushed and bridled, and

cried in a shrill and ungentle little voice: "At my age, in sooth! Fie upon you, Sister Difficult! What have I to do with spectacles, I that have as clear sight as any girl!"

Mistress Difficult made no reply in words, but she turned up her eyes, lifted her hands, and sniffed audibly.

By this womanly pantomime Jock was effectually robbed of one witness, for Mistress Henrietta instantly cried, "And in proof thereof, I can see well, even from where I stand, that yonder man is Captain Hetherington."

A subtle elation could be felt in Philip Heyroun's camp, a subtle depression in that of Martin Heyroun. "Are you well assured, mother?" urged Rafe. "'Tis a grave matter."

Promptly the little gentlewoman covered her eyes with her handkerchief, and saying that 'twas hard that her own son should side with her detractors, fell to weeping softly. Difficult Heyroun sniffed again, and the little gentlewoman stopped in her weeping to say vehemently, "If I was to die this moment, I'd declare with my parting breath that that man was Captain Hetherington!" Having said this, with much spirit, she resumed her sobbing just where she had left off.

"And now will you believe my word, perhaps?" asked Philip, with an air of patient martyrdom that he must have inherited from his father.

Without reply Rafe turned to the tall girl who stood leaning by the newel post. He spoke low, but the room was still, and his voice travelled: "Mistress Mallory, will you look well upon that man, and bethink you ere you say you know him? It means much, in the long run, to all of us."

Up to that moment the girl had stood with eyes bent down, as if scorning to bear a part in the scene that was being played before her. Now, at Rafe's words, she raised her head slowly, almost fearfully, and fixed her eyes full on Jock.

Wogan took a candle from the table, and holding it level

with Jock's head, threw the light full upon him. Through the dazzle of brightness Jock saw the girl's face, beautiful, vivid, with dusky hair, and white skin, and dark eyes that held his. An angel from heaven might wear such a semblance. For a moment he saw the face devoid of all emotion, save that of intense seeking; then he saw the eyes slowly withdraw from his unspoken appeal, saw the lips break into a faint smile, as Mistress Mallory turned toward Rafe.

"Surely, sir," she spoke in a notably sweet voice, "this is Captain Hetherington."

For one instant there was silence in the hall, a silence in which Jock, still looking blankly at the girl's serene face, felt the impatience and the anger at his needless trick, as they must hold it, surge and mount in the men around him. Then out of the dark of the gallery a young voice, clear as a bell, was raised: "Out on you, Blanche Mallory! That lad is no more black Johnny Hetherington than I am he!"

Jock threw back his head and looked for his Heaven-sent deliverer. She stood leaning with her hands upon the balustrade of the gallery, a young girl and slender, with a mop of brown hair falling about her shoulders, and direct eyes.

"Go to your chamber, you shameless hussy!" cried Difficult, and Henrietta, for once agreeing with her adversary, whimpered, "Would you contradict your aunt, you serpent child?" but Rafe interposed. "Come down, Althea," he begged.

"I'm not garbed for an assembly, cousin," the girl replied with a flashing smile. She had a well-shaped mouth, though large.

"Come down, you peevish jade!" ordered Martin, with a thump of his staff, and thus entreated, Althea came halfway down the stairs.

To the dullest eye it was patent that she had just risen from her bed. She wore a russet cloak that draped her in

long folds from head to heel, and by one string, with a shameless lack of embarrassment, she dangled a nightcap. Henrietta covered her eyes with a scandalized cry, and Difficult repeated, "Hussy!"

"You know Captain Hetherington?" Rafe began his catechism with rekindled hope.

"If I do not, who should? Was it not I pulled your boy Philip out of the horse-trough that morning, Cousin Rafe? And did I not give my brave captain a piece of my mind and a bit of my tongue, to boot?"

"And this man —"

Althea shook her head. "By no means," she said, and looked Jock over with a serenity that Jock, who once more felt his neck grow hot, was far from sharing. "This man is younger than the Captain, and of lower stature, full two inches lower, and moreover, as you see, he has the grace to blush, which Captain Hetherington forgot years since."

This last happy stroke had the effect of turning all eyes on the furiously crimson Jock, who felt an unhallowed desire to shake his benefactress.

A benefactress Althea might indeed have proved, for her positive tone was beginning to tell upon her kinsmen, had not Mistress Mallory thrown her weight into the opposite side of the scales. "What a child thou art, Althea!" she said, half laughing, and she had a pretty laugh. "Indeed, 'tis kind of thee to pity Hetherington and seek to help him, even with a fib."

The younger girl faced her. "It is not I would pity Hetherington," she said, but as she spoke, as if, against her will, she took home the full force of the other's words, she colored slowly.

Straightway the women's tongues assailed her. "You were ever a froward peat!" cried Difficult.

"'Tis but her tender heart," apologized Blanche Mallory,

and when Rafe, who seemed a genuinely brave man, tried to speak a word for the girl, Henrietta put the finishing touch.

"'Tis well," she sobbed. "Defend that little good-for-naught, Rafe, when she has just called your own mother a liar!"

After that Rafe held his peace, with a face blacker than nature had made it, and Althea, swinging her nightcap, turned away. From the head of the stairs she called back, "But he isn't Captain Hetherington!" and so disappeared down the gallery.

Blanche Mallory followed her up the stairs, Henrietta, indignantly rejecting Rafe's aid, followed Blanche, and after them went Difficult, who uttered a last caustic comment. "Perchance now, Brother Martin, you will no longer believe my poor boy to be a liar."

"I never said he was!" cried the exasperated gentleman.

"Who said you did?" quoth his amiable sister-in-law, and so, in the proud consciousness of having had the last word, stalked away into the darkness.

Jock sat down again on his stool and looked at the stone floor between his knees. For one moment he had half formed a plan of asking for more witnesses. Surely in that great house there must be serving folk who would have seen and remembered the face of Captain Hetherington. But speedily he dismissed the plan. Even if he had been allowed further witnesses, a boon which he scarce expected, he judged shrewdly that the serving creatures were bound, after the manner of their kind, to reëcho the testimony of their betters. No, there was nothing for him to say, nothing to do. In the utter weariness of reaction he sat silent, and wondered dully why they should all conspire to lie away his last chance of safety.

Round him he heard the men speaking. "Three witnesses against one silly girl! What would be your decision in a court of law, Mr. Inchcome?" he heard Philip say exultingly, and

then he heard a sharp exclamation from Martin Heyroun, "Whither are you bound, Rafe?"

Jock looked up quickly. Rafe Heyroun had just come from an inner room, with his hat on his head and his cloak cast over one arm. "Homeward, sir," Rafe said curtly, and it could not be otherwise, Jock knew. The silly women's quarrel about the spectacles had been his ruin. If Rafe, for whatever motive, should champion him now, Rafe would have to give the lie to his own mother.

Idly Jock listened to the protests of the men. Wogan said that the night was dark, and Lieutenant Phil that the way home to Draycote was long, and Martin Heyroun said that Rafe was a fool.

"My father's son, sir," said Rafe, civilly, from the doorway. "Give ye good night, sirs, and order your business as likes you best. I wash my hands of it."

Rafe had flung the door open, when Jock started to his feet. "Give you good night, sir," said he, and in tone he wavered, in his own despite, between a taunt and an appeal. "I am your servant for what you sought to do, and what you dare not do."

Rafe wheeled on the threshold. His eyes met Jock's, and in their expression was that which, for a moment, kindled hope in Jock, but straightway that hope was quenched, for between the two men stood the little mother in the flowered tabby. "Give you good night," Rafe said deliberately, "Captain Hetherington."

CHAPTER VI

VISITED IN PRISON

IN the corner where it was dusky the great clock chimed midnight, and as the twelfth stroke died, Esdras Inchcome broke the momentary silence of discouragement that had fallen on the occupants of the hall. "And that is your last word, Captain?" he asked.

"I've said so once or twice ere this," Jock answered. He sat in his old place, with his folded arms resting on the table and his eyes cast down. In body and in mind he was weary almost to the point of stupefaction, for he had not found the last hour an easy one.

With elaborate detail the Heyrouns and their allies, each after his kind, had explained and reexplained to Jock the disadvantages of his position. He had been reminded, to the point of surfeit, that he was their prisoner, that he had no friends to interfere in his behalf, that Graystones was a remote and lonely house, where a variety of mischances, duly specified, might befall him. He had been tantalized with the frequent reiteration that he could have his freedom at the price of the delivery of the little deal box, and at that price alone. When he had insisted that he was not Captain Hetherington and that he had never seen the box, he had been met with ironic compliments on his persistence in a clever lie, or with curses for his stubbornness. Thus with alternation of threats and persuasions the hour had passed, and midnight

found both parties, weary and exasperated, at precisely the same point where they had stood in the beginning.

In due sequence Jock's answer should have been the cue for Martin Heyroun to make another allusion to the efficacy of a rope's end in cases of sheer obstinacy, but even that hale old Trojan was discouraged. He sat gloomily silent, and the young parson groaned, and Captain Wogan, who had strolled to the fireplace, kicked moodily at the logs that smouldered on the hearth. Not an objection was made, for once, when Inchcome took the ordering of affairs into his own hands.

"You shall have the night for reflection, even as you desired but a little while ago," he addressed Jock. "Take him to your custody, Lambert, and I commend to you the west roof room as a strong prison."

Jock rose to his feet, and without reply followed Wogan to the stairway. He heard Inchcome say, "Wait!" and facing about, saw that the old gentleman had turned in his chair and was watching him, with the little malign smile that he had come to disrelish.

"An empty stomach often makes a clear head," said Inchcome. "See to it, Lambert, that Captain Hetherington has neither meat nor drink, until such time as he remembers his own name and the whereabouts of the little deal box."

Out of the sea of bewilderment in which he was drifting, Jock came suddenly to land. Their threats of torture he had listened to with fear, as a man fears a half-seen bogey in a bad dream, but now that he faced the actuality of one definite form of torture, he saw the back of his fear. At that moment when he felt the fear die in him, he felt a dour, quiet anger kindle in its stead. Very deliberately, and with level, insolent eyes on Esdras Inchcome, he tightened by one hole the belt that was about his waist.

"There are three holes more," he said, "and if I had

your deal box, sink me to hell if ever you should have it now !”

With that Jock turned and followed at Wogan’s heels up the stairs, and Lieutenant Phil, carrying a candlestick that he had caught up from the table, closed the file. They crossed the gallery, with the grumble of voices in the lighted hall below fading from their ears as they went, and they passed down a passage where the candlelight cast their long shadows on the dark wainscot. They came to a second stairway, and through a casement at the stair-foot, open to the night, Jock had a glimpse of stars, enmeshed in branches of trees, and smelt the scent of carnations that slept in the garden below. The stairs were steep and narrow, and above them was a dim lobby which they crossed, and then Wogan opened a heavy door into what for the moment seemed darkness.

Jock crossed the threshold promptly. “I thank you for your attendance, gentlemen,” he said, as the door closed behind him.

For a moment he stood in the dark, and listening, heard a key turn in the lock, and then footsteps dying away on the stair. He leaned against the wall and drew a long breath of relief. He was a prisoner, obviously, but at least he was alone, and he need no longer rack himself into alertness while he was staggering with fatigue.

As he grew wonted to the obscurity of the room, Jock raised his head and peered about him. At his left hand, high in the wall, was a little open window, too small for the passage of a man’s body, but giving air and faint starlight, only less dark than the darkness of the room. With the help of such poor light, he presently made out the dim lines of the beams that stayed the roof above his head and of the angles and knees, the jumbled ends of the vast framework of the house, that stood out from the walls, and then, after a

time, he spied against the farther wall something long and low that did not have the appearance of a mere timber. He stumbled thither, and groping with his hands, discovered that he was the undisturbed possessor of a tolerable truckle-bed and a blanket.

To a man who had slept, or rather, lain awake all the last night on the flagstones of St. Andrew's, there was but one natural course. Jock stepped out of his boots, and having slipped off his doublet, folded it into a pillow. Then, with a sense of sybaritic self-indulgence, he laid himself down on the bed and drew the blanket over him. Undoubtedly he was in as bad a predicament as could well be imagined; undoubtedly he would suffer starvation; but let the future bring what it might, for the moment he was comfortable, and he was very tired. He reflected that Inchcome would be disappointed, could he know how he was spending his night of grace, and chuckling at the joke of it, he fell asleep.

Weary as he was, he went far and deep into slumber, and when he grew aware of a sound of footsteps near him he tried to slumber still. He found the effort futile. Strive as he would to clog his waking senses, he heard nearer and nearer the rustling of garments, and through his heavy eyelids he saw more and more clearly the red radiance of light. He felt that some one was shaking him with a weak, but by no means gentle hand, and he heard a voice, a notably sweet voice, though sharply edged with irritation, bidding him to wake.

The contrast between the voice and the hand stirred his curiosity, and with a mighty effort, like the effort with which a diver rises to light and air, he heaved himself broad awake. He found that he lay upon his back on the truckle-bed, and close above him, with a rushlight in one hand and the neck of his shirt gripped in the other, bent Blanche Mal-lory. "Protect my innocence!" Jock said aloud.

The girl stood erect, and her face, half seen in the aura of pale candlelight, flushed faintly and then grew white. She had crossed a dead-line when she entered the room, and the lad's prompt realization of the fact brought realization home to her.

For a moment they eyed each other, she standing upright with the little candle held in a steady hand, he sitting up in his bed, with a difference in pose, but a similarity in hostile intent to that with which Jock and Faintnot Pedock, earlier in the day, had fronted each other. As he remained obstinately silent, she had perforce to speak.

"I came to help you, sir."

"You've had a change of heart," said Jock. In spite of his yearning desire to sleep he was for the moment broad awake, and he remembered the smile with which this girl had borne witness against him.

"Can you not understand?" She leaned a little toward him as she spoke.

She was good to look at, he was willing to admit, and he had not lived five years in camps to be unaware of the conscious purpose with which she had disposed her kerchief about her white neck. She was a little older than he by the tale of years, he reckoned, now that he viewed her closely, but he himself in some essentials was older than his years, and he had to stead him the coldness of his northern blood. He looked upon her, fair, soft, seductive, in the faint candlelight that touched her full throat and tender mouth, and he saw a desirable woman, as he was meant to see, and he saw also, behind the woman-mask, a clever adversary who was seeking — what? With narrowed eyes he watched her, and waited.

"I have but a moment," she said, speaking quickly and softly. "I came to you. I knew no other course. I pray you, be generous when you think upon this rashness of mine.

There is no one in the house whom I may trust. Oh, you that are men, you have no mercy, no pity, when you sit in judgment on a woman! Will you not believe me when I say my one desire is to help you? My father was a loyal gentleman, and I would aid any man that served the cause for which my father died. 'Twas for the sake of the cause that I had speech aforetime with Captain Hetherington." Involuntarily she pressed her free hand to her throat, but she forced her tone to a semblance of careless interest, as she concluded, "Perchance, have you news of how it has gone with the Captain?"

"I am Captain Hetherington," Jock answered.

To him, it was droll to see how the pleading softness fell from the girl's manner, and how the irritation that had edged her bearing when she urged him wake came again to the fore. "Then you lied when the Heyrouns questioned you?" she asked dryly.

With equal dryness he answered: "If I did not lie when I denied to be the Captain, some one else must have swerved from the truth when they gave me his title. Make me not ungallant, mistress."

The girl bit her lip with a momentary impatience that he did not fail to record. "Below in the hall," she explained, "I spoke to gain time. Now I will help you —"

"You are not a fool," said Jock. "Your word, added to that little Althea's word, would have proved to them all that I was not Captain Hetherington, and you know it well. Why did you wish me to stand in Hetherington's place?" As he said the words he looked at her, in the warm splendor of her beauty, and remembering his stalwart, hard-lived cousin, the Captain, he knew the answer to the question, and wondered that he had been so dull as to need to ask it.

Mistress Mallory parried adroitly. "I cannot tell you now all the ins and outs of this unhappy intrigue — there is no

time to tell them. In the hall — unwisely, it may well be — I told a falsehood, for it seemed to me the surest way to help you. And now — oh, yes, I seek a price for my aid, as your eyes seem to say. Indeed, you are too keen for me, sir. Let me speak to you as one man to another —”

In spite of himself Jock grinned. The compliment anent his keenness had softened him, and the suggestion that Mistress Mallory, with her loose kerchief and her eyes and her gestures, should be looked upon as a man, hit his sense of humor.

The girl caught at his mood and laughed softly with him. “To be sure,” she said, “I want something for something. Tell me where Captain Hetherington is now, whether he be living or dead — we must recover that will, you understand. ’Tis for that I seek tidings of him. Tell me where the Captain is, and I will set you free.”

But Jock, with his northern cool-headedness, was his own master, now that practical considerations were in question. “How will you free me?” he asked, with the directness of a ten-year-old.

“What a boy you are!” She had drawn near him, and as if he were indeed a boy, she laid her hand lightly on his shoulder. “Can you not trust me?”

He looked up at her, as she bent over him, and his eyes were not a boy’s eyes. There was in them enough of cynical comprehension and cynical amusement to make her draw back. “When I’m a free man,” he said, “I’ll tell you more of my cousin, the Captain, than ’twill rejoice you to hear, but I’ll not tell it till I am a free man.”

Jock spoke, not from mere impulse, but from the resolve that he had made hours before in the hall. Half in obstinacy he had determined not to yield a shred of information to the folk who had browbeaten him, half in settled policy he had reasoned that, perhaps, when his captors grew cooler and real-

ized, as in the end they must, that he was not Captain Hetherington, he might buy himself immunity with the offer of sure tidings of the man they sought. At present when he could win credence for no word of his, when he could not hope for them to verify his story by travelling to Colchester, he should only waste his information, whether he gave it to this girl or to another, and, even as she had phrased it, he did not purpose, northern born as he was, to give something for less than something.

A woman, and a shrewd one, Blanche recognized the finality of Jock's stubbornness more readily than the men had recognized it. "So be it!" she said, and turned to the door. "If you refuse my aid, you may thank yourself that you remain a prisoner — and hungry." She eyed him narrowly. "Esdras Incheome is a man of his word," she mused aloud. "By to-morrow night you will be cruel hungry."

"I could guess that without your coming to my chamber to tell me," said Jock.

"As it chances," she went on, "I have here in my pocket bread and meat that I fetched hither without Captain Wogan's knowledge. The food is yours — an you will tell me of Captain Hetherington."

Jock laughed noiselessly, with his lips baring his teeth. "Keep your bread, mistress," he said. "Give it to your lap-dog, and perchance he will rear up on his hinder legs and beg for it prettily. I am not a dog." But he was a hungry man, and moved by the cruelty of her reminder of his hunger, he added, "Did you buy Captain Hetherington with a morsel of bread, or with something sweeter, perchance?"

In that moment Jock saw the real woman, the woman who would have moved him as a pawn in her game and who had been checked in her move. Blanche Mallory stood at her full height, in a dazzling semblance of outraged modesty. "You vile horse-boy!" she said softly. "I be half minded to call

Lambert Wogan to deal with you. He waits without in the lobby. I have but to raise my voice —”

“Waits, does he?” said Jock, and his eyes widened with comprehension. Reminded by her words, he suddenly put two and two together. Whether or not the girl lied when she said that Wogan was without, it was true that Wogan had the key to his prison, the key by which she had gained entrance thither, and that key Wogan was not likely to yield into the hands of every woman that asked for it. Jock grinned evilly. “Call him in, my mistress,” said he. “Call in Wogan, who loves you, and I’ll tell him a tale of Captain Hetherington whom you loved.”

He met her eyes fairly, held them for a moment, and saw that his shot had gone home. Deliberately he lay down again with his face to the wall. “Give you good night!” he said, and settled himself to sleep.

A moment later he felt that she stood beside him, and he heard her speak in an altered, breathless voice. “Yes, I love Hetherington, even as you taunt me with doing. I have lied to you, but this is true that I love him. Oh, in mere mercy tell me, tell me where he is!”

But Mistress Mallory had played too many parts with Jock to win his pity now. Through all her transformations he had held to the fact that he had one piece of information that was of value to her, and if he would not part with it in the way of trade, he would not part with it now for love to the woman that had sought to snare him into betraying it. That she had thought him a knave he might forgive, that she had thought him a fool, never!

With a dire weight of silent obstinacy he lay motionless, till he heard her pleadings falter, and knew that they had ceased. A moment later he heard her step receding to the door, but on the threshold, it seemed, she paused. “And yet,” she said, in her former self-contained voice, that hinted at how little

of truth had been in her latest pleading, "in the end you will be sorry, I think, that you did not do as I besought you."

Then Mistress Mallory went out and locked the door behind her, and Jock, broader awake than he had ever been before in his life, lay staring into the dark and pondering on many things.

CHAPTER VII

FROM AN ATTIC WINDOW

WHEN Jock next awoke he found that his prison was full of modified daylight, and through the little window, high in the wall, he had a glimpse of clouded sky. Obviously it was morning, breakfast time, but as obviously he had no hope of breakfast, and therefore he saw no need of rising. Instead he snuggled down beneath his blanket, and with wits cleared by sleep and sharpened by hunger, reviewed his position. As he pieced together what he knew, what he suspected, and what he desired, the story of the Heyrouns and of Captain Hetherington ran much as follows:—

There was a man named Philip Heyroun — manifestly not the Philip Heyroun who died An. Dom. 1605. On that point Jock was now almost convinced though, being of the north, he disliked to admit it. This Philip Heyroun had a brother Martin, father of Rafe and of Lieutenant Phil, and an unnamed brother, husband to Mistress Difficult, — in the midst of his own troubles Jock spared him a sigh of commiseration, — and father of the chestnut-haired Philip and of the young parson. Philip Heyroun was apparently a man of substance, and he had been dwelling in the preceding June at Graystones, the house that was now Jock's prison, with his sister-in-law, Mistress Henrietta, his nephew, the chestnut-haired Philip, and the two young women, Blanche Mallory and Althea, whose relationship to the story Jock could not yet determine.

Upon this household at Graystones had descended Captain Hetherington, who had landed near Clegden in Suffolk, from France, with some lawless followers. His intention, unquestionably, had been to join himself to the king's party, but meantime he had established himself by force of arms at Graystones, where he had won the opposite of golden opinions.

"Standing in my cousin's room," soliloquized Jock, "I am accused of theft, of murder, and of an attempt at drowning a young child. 'Tis only arson and bigamy, so far, that have not been laid to my credit. Truth, he was a pretty, stirring fellow, was my cousin!"

In the ample leisure that now was his, Jock tried to guess just what had happened beneath the surface during that momentous period at Graystones. The results had been that Captain Hetherington, for devilry or for weightier reason, had possessed himself of Philip Heyroun's will, and thereby had brought about the death of the testator. Those were the results, but the causes were further to seek.

This, at least, was clear: Mistress Mallory had so borne herself toward the Captain that she had wished to see another man, incapable of bearing tales, stand in his place to answer Wogan's questions, and Philip, the chestnut-haired, for his own good reasons, had been equally desirous of keeping him out of the way. By this time Jock was morally certain that it was Philip, the only man at Graystones who had had acquaintance with his kinsman, who had whispered to him in the dark of the porch, and that Philip wished to befriend the Captain meant, to Jock's mind, one of two things: either he loved the Captain, which was improbable, or he feared him exceedingly.

When he had reached this conclusion, Jock rolled over fretfully where he lay. "Now a wildfire on me," he grumbled, "but I would that I knew what 'tis my cousin knew about Master Philip!"

The sense of the imperfectness of his knowledge was a constant irritation to Jock. He felt certain that, had his cousin, with his complete grasp of the circumstances, stood in the same jeopardy, he would have found a way out. Somehow, by the common knowledge that was among them, he would have forced Blanche and Philip to do his will, while Jock, holding no more than a few broken threads, paused baffled whenever he sought to weave a net that might enmesh them.

By now a little uncertain sunlight was straggling through the window, and thither Jock turned his attention. Up to that moment he had not dreamed of investigating the window, for he bore in mind the lesson that he had learned by ocular demonstration at St. Andrew's, namely, that for a prisoner to show his head at a window was to court a bullet through the brain. At Graystones, however, the case might be altered, and at any rate he was tired of alternately wondering about Blanche and Philip, and thinking how hungry he was. So he rose up, and shoving the truckle-bed beneath the window, mounted upon it and cautiously looked forth.

He was aware first of a gable of the house on either side of his window, and a steep slope of tiled and moss-grown roof between, like a chute, down which he looked. His position, in short, was analogous to that of a horse, wearing monstrous blinkers. He could see neither to right nor to left, but straight before him he had a long and ever widening perspective. He could see a strip of garden, with a gravelled walk, and apricot and peach trees nailed against a wall upon the right hand. The wall crossed the foot of the garden, and beyond it he saw open country, with intersecting hedges, and here and there clumps of trees, and in the far distance a squat church tower that rose against the sky. Over all the sunlight fell by moments and then was lightly clouded, but he could see enough of the position of the sun to judge that the time must be hard upon mid-afternoon.

The garden, as far as Jock could see, was deserted, and growing confident that no sentry was about, he settled himself as comfortably as might be at the window, with his arm laid along the broad ledge and his head resting upon it. Thus he stood, looking down into the garden and reflecting that he would vastly rather be there than where he was, when he saw two figures come into sight on the path by the farther wall. In a moment he had recognized them. The woman who came first was Blanche Mallory, and the man who followed was Captain Wogan.

With keen interest Jock watched all that passed between them. At every step or two the girl paused to pluck a flower, guelder rose, or carnation, or sweet pease that grew at the left of the path, and she plucked the flowers with a conscious effort to emphasize every grace of her body, and much pretty play of looking back across her shoulder at the man. To these advances Wogan seemed glumly unresponsive. He followed her, grim as fate itself, he stood and waited while she plucked her flowers, and then he followed her again.

Little by little the girl's assurance seemed to waver. As she drew nearer, Jock saw that her face was pinched and anxious, and he imagined that her hands shook as she gathered her flowers. Just below his window, at the nearest point in the garden of which he had clear view, was a little plot of green sward, where stood a sundial and hard by it an old stone seat. When Blanche Mallory reached this spot, she sat down and motioned to Wogan to sit by her. He shook his head and stood before her, a stubborn and implacable figure, and then the girl let fall her flowers, and rising, laid her hand upon his arm. By her face she seemed to be pleading and protesting, but at that distance no word of hers could reach Jock. With a feeling that to be even a handbreadth nearer to the speakers would help him to overhear what might prove to him of great moment, he leaned a little forward at the window.

Perhaps the fixedness of Jock's attention had its effect upon the couple in the garden. In any case, Blanche suddenly turned her face toward his window, and stopped, petrified, it would seem, in the midst of her speech. Wogan instantly followed the direction of her glance, and as Jock withstood the temptation to dodge out of sight, the two in the garden and the one in the window fronted each other for a brief instant. Then Wogan turned, grinding his heel into the gravel as he did so, and strode directly toward the house. The girl, clinging to his arm, striving to hold him back, pleading always, followed a step behind him, and thus they passed out of Jock's sight.

For a little time Jock looked upon an empty garden, where scattered flowers were withering by a vacant seat, and then, on the path just below him, he saw Althea Lovewell appear. He could not mistake her. Indeed, he was not likely to forget the mop of brown hair, and the erect young figure, and the free, boyish carriage. In one hand Mistress Lovewell carried a stool, in the other a hammer, and with an assurance that spoke of premeditation, she planted the stool against the sunny wall, and climbing upon it, began to nail up some straggling shoots of the peach trees. She drove her nails in a capable manner, Jock noted critically, and then he began to study the girl herself, not her work. She wore a tawny-colored gown, with an apron and a plain kerchief of white holland, very neat and without artifice. Her brown hair was uncovered and caught a sheen of gold from the sunlight that fell upon her. She seemed at one with the fresh air and the sunshine and the sweet, homely flowers of the old garden, a creature full of warm young life and merriment and clear honesty. As he looked at her, working among the leaves, all unconscious of his scrutiny, Jock felt an ache in his throat, a longing in his heart, that seemed most like to homesickness, if a man could be homesick, not for any definite place,

but for freedom and peace and the long content of sunny days.

It seemed to Jock that he could have watched the girl for hours, and watching, have forgotten the danger in which he stood and the hunger and the thirst that tormented him, but that solace he was soon to lose. Scarcely had Althea begun upon the second peach tree, with her hammer making blithe music in the quiet garden, when the young parson, all in riding trim, sauntered down the gravelled walk from the house. She looked over her shoulder and must have seen who was approaching, but with much deliberation she went on with her hammering. The young man halted close by her and spoke at some length, to judge by the movement of his lips and the play of his eager face, but still Althea hammered. At last he put up one hand, laying it upon her waist, and at that the girl turned where she stood, very quietly, and looked down at him. He dropped his hand to his side, and she stepped lightly from the stool, and flinging by the hammer, started toward the house. The man followed her, and right by the stone seat suddenly clapped his arm about her and kissed her.

Jock bit off a curse, but next moment, with a chuckle of laughter, was near to applauding, as if he were in a theatre, for the girl had turned, quick as a cat, and struck the man across the face. It was no ceremonious and ladylike tap of the hand either, but a substantial buffet that she dealt him, and having dealt it, she held her ground, with her hands clenched at her sides and her eyes fronting the man unwaveringly. He made as if to speak, but then, as if he thought better of it, turned and, rubbing his flushed face with one hand, slouched away.

The girl kept her position, erect, with head uplifted, till the man, so Jock decided, must have passed out of her sight. Then she strolled back to the stool by the wall, where she

reënforced a nail with an extra tap or two of her hammer and broke off a withered leaf. Throughout she made a great pretence of cheery business, and she even sang a little. Jock caught the lilt of the tune, though not the words. But at last, in the midst of a strain, she fell silent, and presently sank upon the stool, where she sat brooding, with her elbow on her knee and her chin in the cup of her hand.

The sun had now dropped so far toward the west that the shadows were long in the garden. The girl sat in the shade of the wall, and once she shivered, as if the air were chill. Of a sudden Jock found himself thinking, "How little she is!" He remembered the bitter fliers that the women had cast at her the night before and the insolent manner, almost that of master to servant, with which old Martin Heyroun had addressed her. Surely, life at Graystones was not easy for this girl. Like himself, she could not find the mercy of the Heyrouns tender. The lonely boy in his attic prison watched the lonely girl, brooding in the garden, and seeing some dim likeness in their outcast circumstance, felt his heart grow big with pity for her.

When Althea rose at last and, in a nonchalant manner that spoke well for her steadiness, took her stool and her hammer and walked away, Jock felt lonelier than ever. He no longer cared to look upon the empty garden, so he shoved the bed into its old place, and sitting down upon it, waited to see what should next befall him. He did not find that waiting in a bare and dismal room, with a growing dizziness in the head and a growing faintness at the pit of the stomach, was altogether composing, so he felt in his pockets for distraction. Thanks to their shabbiness, he had been suffered keep his own breeches, what time the guards at St. Andrew's had possessed themselves of his boots and doublet, but, to compensate, he had parted with almost the entire contents of his pockets, and to his disappointment he found

that he now owned in the world no more than a short piece of cord and a small lump of chalk.

Still, "something had some savor," he comforted himself, and a lump of chalk was better than nothing. Promptly he knelt upon his bed, and set himself to beautifying the bare walls of his prison with loyal sentiments and spicy personal comments on the Roundhead leaders. He was deep in this childish but interesting pastime when he heard the click of a key in the door, and he looked over his shoulder just in time to see Captain Wogan stride into the room.

It needed but a glance to assure Jock that Wogan was in nearly, if not quite, as bad a temper as he had been in when he quitted the garden. He saw that Wogan's lips were thin and that his eyes smouldered, and with a feeling that he were best refrain from trivialities, he dropped the chalk into his pocket and faced about to confront his adversary.

Right by the bed Wogan halted and stood glowering down at Jock. "I've no share in their cursed will," he said, "but when you have to do with Mistress Mallory, you trespass where it concerns me. Do you take my meaning? You're going to tell me the truth of what was between you afore-time."

"The truth?" Jock asked with effort, for now that he came to speak he found that his throat was dry with thirst. He moistened his lips and tried again. "You want the truth?" he asked, and then for one minute he was sorely tempted to tell the truth as he believed it to be. Surely, he owed something in kind to the girl that had deliberately lied away his safety and then had sought to beguile him to work her will. It were easy for him to pay the score. He need not go out of his identity and acknowledge that of Captain Hetherington. He had only to say that he, Jock Hetherington, had heard his cousin, the Captain, make his boast of the easy conquest he had won at Graystones, and the game that

Mistress Mallory was playing with Captain Wogan would be checked surely, maybe for all time.

"I'm going to have the truth," repeated Wogan, standing over Jock.

It was curious that when Jock had made up his mind to treat the girl as he held that she deserved, he should say in reality, should hear himself saying: "I am not Captain Hetherington. I never so much as heard of Mistress Mallory, let alone saw her, till yesternight." But after all, the woman was a woman, and he was glad, now that he had said the words, that he had spoken the mere truth of her.

"So 'twas for her sake that you lied about your identity," said Wogan, coolly, "in the hope that you might not be questioned to her detriment, eh? Upon my soul, you're a better gentleman and a greater villain than I thought you, but 'twill not profit you!" As he spoke, he caught at Jock's throat with the same movement that he had made the night before.

Lessoned by experience, Jock dodged and gained his feet, but it availed him little. Unarmed, faint with starvation, he had small hope against an armed man who, even at the best of times, was heavier and taller than he. After a bare half minute of struggling, he found himself on his back on the truckle-bed, with Wogan's knee pressing upon his chest and Wogan's hand at his throat. "I made you speak once. I'll make you speak again," he heard Wogan say. "Tell me honestly what was between you and Mistress Mallory, or —"

Jock felt Wogan's hold tighten on his throat, and with a light-headed sense of the crass absurdity of a jealous man's reasoning, he wanted to laugh and could not. He saw Wogan's face recede into a mist, and then, at a distance, he heard a stern voice speak: "Lambert! Have done, you fool!"

Jock knew that the pressure was taken from his throat,

and he lay fighting for the breath that had well-nigh been choked out of him. When he was able at last to lift his head and look about, he saw that in the doorway, formal and courteous as ever, stood the old lawyer, Esdras Inchcome. "And so, Lambert," Inchcome was closing what seemed a long discourse, "bear in mind that repetitions are wearisome, and oftentimes unadvisable. Now I pray you go, and according to our agreement leave Captain Hetherington to me."

Half abashed, Wogan turned, muttering, as it seemed, an apology to Inchcome, and so went from the room. As the door closed behind him, Jock rose unsteadily to his feet. "I pray you, be seated, sir," he addressed Inchcome, and with a good imitation of the old gentleman's courtesy, motioned him to the bed, the one seat that the bare room afforded.

Inchcome looked at him, and then with a dry smile sat down gravely in the proffered seat. Jock remained standing. "I thank you for your kindness in coming here to seek me," he complimented his visitor seriously.

If Jock had had any purpose of annoying Inchcome with grave mockery, he would have been wofully disappointed. Esdras Inchcome was not Martin Heyroun. He looked at Jock and chuckled audibly. "Captain," he said, "you are, in some respects, a wonderful young man. I hope, for all our sakes, you'll prove a wise young man, eh? You're hungry, I take it —"

"You're too courteous," said Jock.

"Well, supper waits for you below — as soon as you agree to my terms touching the little deal box."

Jock laughed.

"Come, come, boy, don't be a stubborn fool!" said Inchcome, testily.

They eyed each other in the dusk that now was settling in the room. As they were both, after their kind, shrewd men, they wasted no time in argument. "Well," said Jock,

at length, "what is it to be, sir? A rope's end, as Martin Heyroun suggested, or lighted match, as that sweet youth, the lieutenant, advised?"

Inchcome raised a protesting hand. "You play the child, Captain," said he, "to speak in such a strain. I am a man of law, remember, and you shall be dealt with by just legal methods, I promise you." He rose and walked slowly to the door, but there he halted, and with his chilling little smile fronted Jock. "I shall come in the morning to ask you for the deal box, and 'twill be for the last time," he explained. "If you still refuse to yield it up, I shall take you to-morrow, under guard, to Bury St. Edmund's, where you will be brought before the justices as a common thief."

Involuntarily Jock made a step toward the speaker, but Inchcome fronted him without flinching. "Captain Wogan and two of his troopers are just without," he said. "I should be loath to call them in."

Jock turned from him, and sitting down upon the bed, forced himself to be quiet, though he clenched his hands as he sat. "Well — your justices?" he said after a moment. "They won't dare convict me."

"Nay, but they will," Inchcome replied. "'Twas a notorious theft you committed here at Graystones, before actual warfare began, and our good folk, here in the county, have no love to gentlemen of your party. My brother magistrates will convict you, sir, of the theft of that deal box, and do you know the penalty that we mete out to thieves?"

Jock moistened his lips before he answered, "No."

"You will be whipped at the market cross," said Inchcome, "forty lashes or more on the naked back in the open market. Then you will spend six months in the jail."

There was a moment of silence ere Jock lifted his head. "Well," said he, with a quiet sincerity that carried conviction, "when I am freed of the jail, I shall go seek you, sir."

Inchcome chuckled. "An assault would mean worse than the jail," he said, "and murder would mean worse than all. Come, come, yield up the box, sir. 'Tis your only course, unless you are fain of a public whipping."

So saying, Inchcome went quietly from the room, and Jock, sitting with bent head and clenched hands, waited until he heard the last footstep die away on the stair. Then he dropped down upon his bed and buried his face in his arms.

CHAPTER VIII

NIGHT WANDERER

At the moment, to confess an unlovely truth, Jock was more thoroughly cowed than ever he had been, even in the course of a life that, though short, had known more of kicks than of caresses. By Inchcome's diabolic ingenuity he was required to face the precise kind of shameful punishment that was best adapted to kill what courage was left him, and he was required to face it at precisely the time when, weakened with thirst and hunger and solitary brooding, he was physically most unfitted to endure it. If he had known the hiding-place of the deal box, beyond all question he would have told it, or anything else by which he could have purchased immunity, but so cruelly was his dilemma contrived that, with the best will in the world, he had not the power to make the restitution that was the price of his safety.

Broken and hopeless, he lay for an unmarked time face down upon his bed. At first, too stunned to plan for his relief or even think coherently, he could only wonder why this thing had befallen him, and then how he was to bear it, and by such stages he found himself picturing, with more and more cruel distinctness, just what it was that he must bear. In his mind's eye he saw the swarming market-place of a dingy town and the faces of people that crowded the overhanging windows, and he seemed to hear the jeers of the crowd and the laughter of brazen women. It was in such a place,

the sport of such a rabble, that he must stand up, bound, stripped, a convicted thief.

At that point the lately broken and dispirited Jock sat up. "Now renounce my soul to hell if ever they shall strip and whip me!" he said in savage anger, and in that anger lay his salvation.

As long as he had sought to run from the whipping because he was afraid of it, he had floundered hopelessly in a black morass of circumstance, but now when he looked upon it as a thing to be avoided because the Heyrouns, his enemies, desired him to meet it, when, in short, he ceased to waste strength in pitying himself as a victim and turned all his energies to hating and baffling his persecutors, he found himself on firm ground once more. He was going to escape out of the hands of the Heyrouns. That much was clear, and according to custom, when he had made up his mind as to what was the immediate need of the moment, he set to work to supply it, without a single disheartening thought as to what should come next.

The ensuing fifteen minutes were busy ones for Jock. He did a little brisk thinking; he tried the firmly locked door; he inspected the narrow window, all the time with anger at the Heyrouns waxing great within him. Then, groping in the dark, he wrote on the wall with his bit of chalk, by way of valedictory:—

"I thanke you forr ye bedde but ye borde was nott to my likeinge.

"JOK HEDDRINTON (*nott Capitaine Heddrinton*)."

This done, he slipped off his doublet and boots, bound them together with his bit of cord, and after securing one end to a nail just within the window-ledge, dropped the bundle out upon the roof. Finally, when he had made these simple preparations, he accomplished the impossible by crawling feet first

through the window, which, to any sane mind, was obviously too narrow to give passage to his body.

Jock had to favor him the facts that he had laid off his doublet, that he knew how to carry his arms, outstretched above his head, so as to make his shoulders as narrow as possible, that he was wasted to unusual thinness with days of short commons, but even so he would never have succeeded in the attempt, had he not been in an extraordinary mood of desperation. For one hideous second indeed he felt his shoulders caught and held as in a vice, but thinking on the Heyrouns, he slowly worked himself free. With his shirt in ribbons and his back rased and sore, he found himself at last outside of the window, a free man again, and in that moment of jubilation he felt himself gently sliding down the roof and remembered, for the first time, that the slope ended in a sheer fall, presumably of two stories, to the garden below.

For some desperate moments Jock clung to the windowledge, lying face down with his arms at full stretch above his head and his feet groping vainly for support. Far off in the darkness he heard the whistle of a stone curlew, a sound that he was destined for long thereafter to associate with the smell of mouldering lichens that grew upon the roof and the sensation of sweat starting on his neck and temples. He felt the strength ebb in his straining arms and a deathly faintness surge over him. He knew the danger of a physical collapse at that moment, and, one fear driving out another, caught at his slipping self-control. After all, he told himself, it would be no worse to be dashed to pieces on the garden walk than to die in his prison by his own hand, as he had thought of doing, could he find no other way of escape from the mercy of the Heyrouns.

At thought of the Heyrouns Jock became steady again, and looked about to see what should be his next move. He had hoped to be able to climb from his window to the roof above,

but he found that the window was set in the face of a gablet, so tall that to climb up it was out of the question. He must then go down, as fate and the laws of gravitation plainly intended him to go, so, with some natural qualms, he released his hold on the window-ledge. For an ugly moment or two he expected each second to shoot off into space, but fate at last fought on the losing side, and presently he found himself checked in his descent by the hollow curve of the sagging roof.

From that point Jock's course was comparatively simple. He could not go up; he could not go down any farther unless he wished to risk a broken neck; therefore he must go round. This he proceeded to do, and, with his recovered bundle tied to his belt, he edged inch by inch along the narrow beam at the base of the right-hand gable. It was a feat possible only for a cat or a most desperate man. When Jock rounded the corner of the gable and stepped at last upon a piece of safe and gently sloping roof, he fell upon his face and lay trembling, with the sweat pouring off him and his hands clutching convulsively at the rough surface of the tiles.

Little by little the fresh breeze and the healing quiet of the night revived him. Tremulously he sat up and looked at the stars. It must be hard on midnight, he reasoned, and if he were to baffle the Heyrouns, he should waste no more time in lingering. Hurriedly he drew on his doublet and boots, and then he set himself to the third stage of his escape, namely, the discovering of a way from the roof of Graystones to the ground.

In the hundred years and more in which the old house had stood, it may well be questioned if any one had ever explored its roofs with such painful care as Jock used on that starry autumn night. He climbed up, and he climbed down, and emboldened by his success in the hair-raising feat of crossing the gable-end, took desperate chances, and came to no harm

thereby. He found a rook's nest, and he found a leak in the roof, and he found a number of details of structure that would have interested an architect. He barked his knees, and he bruised his hands, and, most superfluously, tore his clothes. Once, when he scouted perilously along the edge of the western roof, he heard a casement clatter open below him and a querulous female voice cry: "Puss! Puss! What can ail the cat?" which so alarmed him that he lay quiet for some minutes. But with all his ramblings and adventures, from the highest chimney to the lowest gable of the main roof, he found no tree, nor vine, nor projecting bit of masonry that by any chance would give him passage to the ground.

Tired and well-nigh discouraged, Jock stopped at last in an angle of the eastern roof, and sitting there, watched listlessly while the waning moon rose above the dark horizon line, which he judged must be the sea. He watched the white light broaden on the open country and noted each moment some fresh detail of tree or bush or threadlike footpath through the fields below him. Then, as he let his eyes fall nearer home, he noted at his left hand a casement that projected never so little beyond the end of a gable, and the gable was like to the one that earlier in the evening he had skirted. Slowly he formed a crazy plan. If he could not descend by the outside of the house, as obviously he could not, without wings, why not go down inside the house? Pitfalls and ambuscades he might find in plenty, but at worst he could only be recaptured, and that same fate would be his, should he sit supinely on the roof all night.

Having made his resolution, Jock promptly put it into practice. Five minutes later, standing on a three-inch beam and clutching for dear life to the window-ledge, he thrust the chosen casement wide with his elbow. Within he saw a white patch of moonlight on dark boards, the dim bulk of a four-posted bed, and then, in far greater fear of the dizzy fall be-

hind him than of what might wait before, he swung one leg over the window-ledge and dropped quietly to the floor of the chamber.

At that moment, getting better wonted to the dim light, Jock saw that the bed was tenanted. A dark and beautiful young woman, in a wrought nightcap, sat up among the coverlets with her hands pressed to her breast. She looked at him with wide, startled eyes, and very naturally opened her mouth to scream.

It was not a time for small conventionalities. Jock reached the bed in two swift and soundless strides, and flinging one arm about the young woman, clapped his free hand across her mouth. "Don't scream, Mistress Mallory!" he said in a low voice. "I'll do you no harm if you'll be quiet. And don't bite!" he added warningly.

There was a moment of intense silence, then the wrought nightcap, resting perforce against Jock's breast, gave a nod of acquiescence, and he slightly relaxed his hold. "You — you shameless ruffian!" said Blanche Mallory, in a stifled voice. "What do you seek of me?"

"Mere civility," Jock answered. "You visited me last night, mistress. Now I return the compliment."

The girl had mastered her first bewilderment and natural terror. She looked up at him with good courage and scorn in plenty in her eyes. "You are apt at playing the swaggerer," she said, "when you deal with a woman. If you have to deal with men, perchance —"

"I shouldn't call them," Jock suggested. "There'll be explanations for you, mistress, to make to Captain Wogan. I'm Captain Hetherington, remember. And 'tis passing strange, and will so seem in Wogan's sight, that in the first hour of his freedom Captain Hetherington sought your chamber." For an instant he met the full force of the blazing anger in her dark eyes, and then he saw it sink and die to abject fear. He

let fall his arm that held her and stepped back from the bedside. "You will not call," he said.

"No," she answered, and wrung her hands together where they rested on her knees. "What do you seek of me?" she asked again dully.

"Both our profits," he replied. "Look you, mistress, if I go away — I that am Captain Hetherington — Wogan will forget, and above all, he will never discover that there is another Hetherington, who might tell him much if he were questioned. Is it not better that I steal away quietly?"

She looked at him and seemed to ponder, interlacing her fingers the while. "How shall I aid you?" she questioned at last abruptly.

"Tell me the safest way out of the house and my surest path northward."

Whatever her faults, Mistress Mallory had the virtues of prompt decision and succinct speech. "To the left down the passage," she said, "and so down the stair at the back of the house. In the passage below is a door that opens on the stableyard, but since Wogan is quartered here, some of his troopers lie in the chambers above the stables, so do not risk going that way. Turn again to your left, cross the outer hall till you reach a passage that is flagged. Follow this past the kitchen, and you will come to a door that leads into a little paved court. Scale the wall that is before you, and you will gain the paddock, and beyond the paddock is the lane that runs northward to Heronswood. Avoid the village, for the rest of Wogan's troop, under Lieutenant Heyroun, are quartered there. Does this content you?"

"I am your servant," said Jock, with a grave bow. "As man to man" — in his own despite he smiled — "I thank you."

Said Mistress Mallory, most fervently, "I pray Heaven I never set eyes on you again!"

"Amen!" said Jock, and stepping softly, passed from her chamber and closed the door behind him.

He had no great faith in the girl's honesty, but he believed that for her own advantage she might abet his escape, and, in any case, he might as well trust to her guidance as plunge blindly into the labyrinth of Graystones. He turned to the left down the passage, and felt his way with infinite caution until, to his joy, he reached the head of a stair. So far, at least, Mistress Mallory had kept faith, and with quickening hope he stole down the stair, crept across the outer hall, and groped along the passage till he reached the door that led to the little court.

As Jock laid hand to the latch, he heard a sudden thud and a patter of little feet. For an instant he nearly lost control of himself, but next moment he was ready to laugh at his fears, as the family cat, who had once that night been his scapegoat, came rubbing and purring about his legs. Swiftly he pieced together the circumstances. Probably puss had been thieving in the kitchen adjacent to the passage, where food was to be found, and if the cat could find food, surely a hungry man could do likewise. There were risks, yes, but there were also risks in going forth, half-starved and weak, into a hostile country. Whichever way he looked, there were risks to be run, and now that he thought upon it, he was near crazed with hunger.

As Jock found that last argument irrefutable, he groped his way through the open door on his right into the flag-paved kitchen. He had only the faintest moonlight to aid him, but he caught a pale reflection given back from the surface of a bucket of water that stood on a form. He stepped thither and drank eagerly, thirstily, thankfully, though with prudent moderation. Breathing deep for comfort, he stood up at last, and moving warily, searched the kitchen for food. He found a cupboard, but it was locked, and he found a dish, but the

cat had licked it clean. Almost in despair of supper, he passed out of the kitchen into what seemed a promising pantry. He had not even the faint moonlight of the kitchen to aid him in these dark recesses, but with his hands he found a shelf and groped along it.

At that moment Jock became aware of a faint, creaking sound. "It's the cat," he told himself, and then he stopped, frozen in his tracks. It was not the cat. It was a cautious human footstep, and it drew nearer and nearer. Mechanically he moved his hand a little, and in so doing, touched the handle of a knife. He caught at it eagerly, for even a bread knife were better than no weapon at all. He stepped to the half-closed door of the pantry, crouched low, with the knife in his hand, and waited.

He heard the footsteps just without in the kitchen. Through the crack of the door he saw a faint glow of candlelight steal along the flagstones. He heard the footsteps nearer, nearer. Oh, a pretty trick that lying jade had played him! With a prayer that his would-be captor might prove to be Lambert Wogan, he swung back the knife, ready to strike.

The door, behind which he was sheltered, was flung wide. In the opening, candle in hand and her russet cloak draped about her, stood Althea Lovewell, and looked with amazed eyes at the apparition that confronted her. "O Gemini!" said Althea Lovewell.

CHAPTER IX

EACH TO HIS OWN

HAVING said, "O Gemini!" Althea, with great presence of mind, dropped the candle.

Jock saw the broken orbit that the falling light described, and then saw the little flame snuffed out with the wind of its own fall. He felt the darkness, blacker for the instant of light, close round him, and through the dark he sensed that the girl was stealing away. For one moment he felt the savage impulse to catch her in his arms and smother the outcries that were sure to come, just as he had done in the case of Blanche Mallory, but for some reason he hesitated. Perhaps it was because he remembered Esdras Inchcome's saying, that repetitions were wearisome and oftentimes unadvisable; perhaps it was because he was too tired in body and in spirit for any sudden action; perhaps it was because he had a vague sense that this girl was of different metal from Mistress Mallory and to be differently entreated.

In any case, he stood quiet for an appreciable moment, and with breath indrawn waited for the scream that the girl was sure to give. He heard no sound, and then, on desperate impulse, he spoke huskily, "If you cry for help, mistress, the game is ended for me."

Out of the darkness her voice answered, low and with a little tremor that belied the steadiness of the words: "I have not cried out, have I? Pray you, Mr. Hetherington, lay down that knife!"

Jock obeyed, and more than obeyed. As if his muscles of their own will responded to her words, he dropped the bread knife, and in the same second, with equal lack of intent, dropped himself to the floor of the pantry. He did not try to explain how or why he landed on the floor, but he felt that he had had enough, for one night, of scapes and startling encounters. He heard, very far in the distance, a little agitated stir of garments, a rush of swift feet, and then he saw the flicker of the relighted candle, and shut his eyes against the light. When he opened them again, he saw Althea bending over him.

Guiltily Jock tried to drag himself to his knees. "I — I must have stumbled," he explained in a voice that to his ears sounded remote.

"You're starving!" said the girl, and either his sight was playing him tricks, or else her eyes pitied him.

"I — have been — less hungry," he jested brokenly, and sank back again where he lay.

After another drowsy interval of semiconsciousness he grew aware of the light of the candle, and he realized that the candlestick was set upon the kitchen hearth, easily within his range of vision as he looked through the open door of the pantry. He saw that the flame of the candle wavered, as if a casement somewhere were set wide, but, save for that little movement of the candle-flame and the corresponding movement of the shadows on the bare walls and the flagged pavement of the kitchen, he saw no sign of life. He judged that the girl had gone away, to rouse the household, perhaps, but it was of no great matter — nothing mattered to him much, except that his neck was aching, where his shoulders were propped against the wall.

To relieve the ache, he pulled himself to his knees, and so crawled out into the kitchen. He felt the night air from the open casement, cool and clear upon his face, heartening

and good as a draught of water. He breathed deep, reviving with each breath, and thanks to such restorative, found strength to stagger across the room. There he sank down on the raised hearthstone, with his back against the side of the great oven, and waited for what fate should send next.

He was wondering if Captain Wogan or perhaps Esdras Inchcome would be first in the field, when Althea came softly into the kitchen. For a moment she paused listening on the threshold, with her face turned to the darkness of the passage, then she closed the door noiselessly behind her and came toward the hearth. As she drew nearer, so that Jock saw her face in the candlelight, he felt a guilty hotness in his cheeks. He was not proud of the suspicion that had made him think this girl had gone to betray him.

"Was I long gone?" Althea questioned, and her voice was gentler than he had guessed from what he had seen and heard of her. "I durst not take the candle into the great hall lest some one spy me. I had to grope my way. 'Tis wine that they left at supper. Drink!"

She carried in one hand a flagon, he noted now, withdrawing his eyes from her face, and while he drank, she steadied the flagon at his lips. This she did with a comradeship, and an unconsciousness of anything but comradeship, that would have become a fellow-soldier, and when he realized this, and, knowing much of other manners in women, appreciated it, he became shy and circumspect.

For it was characteristic of this man, so newly arrived at manhood, that when he fronted conditions or folk that to him were unfamiliar, he became a boy again. In St. Andrew's church, facing soldiers to whom he was used, he had borne himself with assurance, while in the hall at Graystones, pitted against civilians whom he did not understand, he had been bewildered and hesitant. In like fashion, where he had borne himself as a seasoned campaigner toward Mistress

Mallory, whose type he knew, in the presence of this little Althea with the honest eyes, a mere young girl, such as he had seldom accosted, he turned boy again, gentle and respectful to a degree that Mistress Mallory would have sworn impossible in him.

In her own good time, Althea set down the flagon on the broad hearth. "Now," said she, with motherly eyes on Jock, "I'll seek you out some supper. If ever again you go a-foraying for food, here where my Aunt Difficult rules, waste no time in exploring those closets that stand open. My Aunt Difficult holds that this, mine uncle's great house of Graystones, is to be ordered like her own starveling grange by Clegden village. Wherefore to conclude, in the phrase of my cousin Jarvis, the parson, the very crumbs of the table, yea, even the bare soup-bones, languish thriftily under lock and key."

While she ran on in this strain, somewhat, it seemed, to set Jock at ease, and somewhat to do the like kind service by herself, Althea had mounted on a stool and with a dexterity that suggested old experience had taken down a key from its hiding-place upon a dark rafter. With this key she unfastened the cupboard that so short a time before had baffled Jock's efforts, and from its depths drew forth a fresh quartern loaf, the half of a boiled mallard, and a delectable seeming mutton pasty. These she ranged on the hearthstone, and with a gesture bade Jock fall to.

It was to his credit perhaps that, with two days of hunger behind him and with food in reach of his hand, he still had the strength and the grace to hold himself in check. "As your guest, is it?" he asked, looking up at her.

For the second time in his life, he saw the sudden flashing smile light up Althea's face. "How else?" she questioned, sitting down on the hearth. "I too am near starved. My Aunt Difficult sent me supperless to bed, but as you see, I had no thought of sleeping supperless."

With such brief ceremony the strangely sorted pair began their meal. At first, between shyness and hunger, they interchanged few words. Save for the faint stir of the night wind at the open casement and the flicker of the guttering candle, it was very still in the dim kitchen. Once the half-open door of the pantry creaked on its hinges, and in the silence the unexpected sound was startlingly loud. Althea gave a little gasp of apprehension, and Jock, in his own despite, glanced toward the door to the passage.

Linked in sympathy by their fear, they drew a little closer where they sat upon the hearth, and Althea put into words their common thought. "It was no more than the wind. But if any one should come — 'twould go ill with you, would it not?"

Jock shrugged his shoulders, and reached for a second piece of bread. "What of you?" he asked.

"Why, they would rate me, my aunts and my uncle. They do it so often that now I scarce heed them." She spoke hardily, but her lip quivered never so little.

"I've known gentler folk than those that dwell at Graystones," Jock supplemented. "So you're a niece to the whole jovy fellowship?"

Althea nodded. Now that she had satisfied her hunger, she sat back on the hearth with her cloak huddled about her, and suddenly, as if she felt relief at unburdening herself, she began the very story that Jock was aching to hear. "My mother was their sister — Philip's and Martin's and Benjamin's. There have always been Heyrouns here at Heronswood, you must know, sir. The old manor house stands at the other end of the village, hard by the church. They had the house and the name of gentlefolk, but they had little else till my Uncle Philip's day, he that died last June."

"I know," said Jock, "he that did not die An. Dom. 1605."

"No," said Althea, "that was my grandfather. My Uncle

Philip, he of whom I spoke, went up to London and became a Turkey-merchant and built him a vast fortune. He made his brother Martin the master of one of his great ships, and his brother Benjamin was one of his factors. Indeed, he made the fortunes of all his kindred. He was a generous soul and kind at heart, though oftentimes violent in his speech. He married a gentlewoman named Mallory, the aunt of Mistress Blanche Mallory, but they had no children."

"Come, I begin to see daylight!" said Jock. "There was no entail? And his estate was large?"

To both questions Althea nodded. "He bought his heirs to forego their legal claim to Heronswood manor. There was no entail. He could dispose of his estate as liked him best, and 'tis a very great estate. There is the old house of Heronswood, and this house that my uncle bought of the Earl of Wiltersey, and there are divers good farmsteads here in the countryside, and houses and shops in London, and ships that are at sea, and moneys besides, and great sums that still are owing from brother merchants. It is a very great estate, so you can judge how eager were my kinsmen to have the squandering of it. Such protestations of love as they made to my Uncle Philip! Such speed did they show in doing his bidding! Such jealous hatred as they bore to each other! Oh, this has been a merry house to dwell in, Mr. Hetherington!"

"They are merry folk that dwell herein," said Jock, with a ruefulness that moved them both to smile. "And your good uncle made a will at last?"

"Oh, many wills," said Althea. "After he had quarrelled with his nephew Rafe that had been his favorite, it became his practice to quarrel with all his kinsfolk in turn, and he made his will to square with the liking of the moment. Therefore he would send for Esdras Inchcome and make his will at least twice a year, though most times 'twas to one or the other of his nephews Philip that he bequeathed his estate.

But to which of them he left it at the last, no one but Esdras Inchcome, who was his lawyer and his lifelong friend, can tell, and he will speak no word. All that he tells us is that my Uncle Philip's last two wills were in the little deal box that he kept in his chamber —"

"And my kinsman," finished Jock, "has borne away box and wills."

"And," said Althea, "if the box and the wills are not found, 'tis an old will of mine uncle's, made five years ago when he had quarrelled with every last man of his kindred, that will stand in law."

Jock's expression was yearning. "Is it granted me to know its contents?" he asked.

The girl smiled with eyes and lips. "Indeed, you have earned the right to know the truth of the matter. By this will, the only will that they have in hand, Mr. Inchcome, my Uncle Martin, and my cousin Philip Heyroun, the one that is not a lieutenant, are made executors, and they are to pay the debts of my deceased uncle, and some legacies to his serving folk, and pay to each of his heirs the sum of four marks, and then the remainder of the estate —"

There the smile bubbled over into a noiseless little laugh, in which Jock speedily joined. "I can guess!" said he.

"I defy you!" said she. "He has bequeathed every groat to make good Christians of the tawny-skinned heathen in the New England plantations and to provide dowries for worthy poor spinsters of London. And my kinsmen — think but upon the sufferings of my kinsmen to be thus defrauded!"

Then, partly because they were very young, and partly because they both had little cause to love the Heyrouns, Jock and Althea joined in a fit of smothered laughter, and they might have exulted indefinitely, had they not, in the midst of their unholy glee, heard a board snap in the casing. At that sound instinctively they caught each other's hands,

no better for the moment than scared children, and they said, "Hush!" a number of times, before they realized that their alarm was needless.

Rather sobered, Jock returned to the devastating of the mutton pasty, while Althea deftly began to make up a parcel of bread and cold mallard. For a moment they busied themselves in uneasy silence, then Jock, consumed with curiosity, took up the interrupted story. "So 'tis for that your kinsfolk are so set to find Captain Hetherington and the deal box and the two wills. They have a hope, then —"

"Sure, no will could use them more scurvily than the one that now stands," the girl answered. "And be sure, my Uncle Martin and his son Philip are as confident that, under the later wills, all is left to the said Philip, as my other cousin Philip and his brother Jarvis are confident that all will fall into their clutches. So they all go a-hunting the deal box, in a happy, zealous mood — all save Rafe."

At the mention of the man who, seeing his plight, had yet most politicly refrained from helping him, Jock bit off an ill-suppressed exclamation that rang far from complimentary.

By that word he struck fire from Althea. "'Tis the truest heart of them all," she came hotly to the defence of the dark Heyroun. "You have no right to scorn him for that he stood for his mother rather than for you, a complete stranger. He has no concern in their wretched wills. He is the only one ever had the manhood to speak his mind to our Uncle Philip. He had been his uncle's heir, but he married Bel Wogan, Captain Wogan's sister, to pleasure himself, against his uncle's wishes. And 'twas no light thing for Rafe to relinquish all hope of a great estate. He has a little farm — they call it Draycote — that came to him from his godfather, and he gains a living for his family, but he loathes the farm, as all can see. He was patterned for larger ventures, like our Uncle Philip that is dead. And yet — hold it to his credit! — he

that so hates to live and die a mere country gentleman would never seek to cozen Uncle Philip of his favors. He is an honest man, I tell you!"

Jock's face was still doubtful, even contemptuous, and moved by that expression the girl added, with something like a sob, "And he is the only one of them all that has ever been kind to me."

"Then they are not kind to you here?" Jock took her up. He pushed aside the empty dish that had held the pasty, and turned to his companion. "You've told me all, except about yourself," he hinted.

Althea looked down, and began twisting the loose clasp at the throat of her russet cloak. "There is little to tell," she said. "My mother wedded against her brothers' will. My father was Sam Lovewell, a Sussex gentleman of no fortune. He was a lieutenant for the king, and died of fever in the camp, just after Newbury fight."

"Why, then," said Jock, involuntarily, "you've had the same history as Mistress Mallory."

Althea turned and gave him such a look that he wished he had bit off his tongue ere it uttered the last sentence. "Pray, when did you have speech with Mistress Mallory?" she questioned with lowered eyelids.

Under this direct attack Jock was helpless. He did not wish to betray Blanche, who at the last had served him under a tacit truce. He did not wish to lie to Althea who had befriended him, and even had he been willing to deceive her, he could not, on the spur of the moment, devise a lie to fit the complicated circumstance. He reddened, stammered, and came at last to a full stop, with appealing eyes on Althea's face.

She laughed, a slightly cruel laugh, though he felt that the cruelty was not aimed at him. "I might have known," she said. "To be sure, Blanche has had speech with you, She

can twist Lambert Wogan round her finger, — the more fool he! So she said her father died fighting for the king?" Again she laughed. "Blanche Mallory's father, Mr. Hetherington, was a worthy brewer at Bury St. Edmund's, and he died in his bed, sorely crippled with gout, four years before the war began. Next time tell her that, with my service to her. Surely, she might do better than to steal my poor, dead daddy!"

"I'm sorry," Jock muttered with genuine penitence, and with genuine fervor, in his heart he cursed Blanche Mallory who, though absent, had thus contrived to break his talk with Althea.

There was no mistaking Althea's new attitude of suspicion. She sat very erect upon the hearth and tugged at the clasp of her cloak until it hung by a mere thread. When at last she broke the uncomfortable silence, her voice came, as it were, from miles away. "It is growing late," she said pointedly. "The candle is near burned out. And you have far to travel, sir."

Jock rose to his feet. "I'll go the moment you bid," he said, "but I pray you, do not send me hence in anger."

"I am not angered," Althea replied with her chin up. "I am sorry for you, and I think you have been hardly used, and I hope you will escape my kinsfolk, but" — she added witheringly — "I doubt if you do, if you believe every word that everybody tells you."

This insinuation of gullibility cut Jock to the heart, but he saw no way of exculpating himself. "I thank you for your kind offices," he said with more dignity than he knew. "It would have gone ill with me, were it not for you. I'm sorry that we may not part as friends."

He turned to the door as he spoke, but before he could lay hand on the latch, he found Althea at his side. "Wait!" she said, and hurt dignity and eager friendliness struggled

together in her voice. "Here's the bread and meat. You must take it with you."

On his next throw he staked all. "No," he said. "I cannot take it as a charity."

"What was it at the start?" she flashed.

"You were not angered with me then."

Their eyes met, and then, with sudden wisdom, the girl shifted her position. "You speak like a child," she said maternally, "but I cannot suffer you go hungry these next hours. Here, stow the bread and meat in your pocket. It was not you I was angered at, and I am not angered now."

"You broke off telling me," he muttered defeated, yet half pleased at his defeat.

She laughed, still maternally. "There was no more story to tell," she explained. "These last years I dwelt with my father's mother, who was born a Holcroft, at a little village in Sussex. Winter before last she died, and since then I've dwelt at Graystones. My Uncle Philip maintained me of his charity, and warned me to expect nothing further of him. And I do not!" she added fervently.

Jock paused in his task of wedging the food into his pocket. "Holcroft?" said he. "Did your grandam come out of Lancashire?"

The girl nodded, "Yes."

"My mother was a Lancashire Holcroft," Jock explained eagerly. "Charlotte Holcroft, she was called. We two are cousins, mistress."

"Ay, verily," said Althea, "we be all cousins in Adam."

"Then you deny the kinship?"

"It seems to me somewhat remote," she answered with a tantalizing smile. "Now God speed you, Mr. Hetherington! We scarce shall meet again."

To his mind the words came as an echo of Blanche Mallory's, "I pray Heaven I never set eyes on you again!" He hesi-

tated, with wistful eyes on the girl who of her charity had brought him food and comfort and the cheer of human companionship in the lonely blackness where he struggled. He hungered for words in which to tell her, ere they parted for all time, just what he thanked her for, but he did not find the words, and as he hesitated, he realized that he was making the girl as uncomfortable as he was himself. He saw that the maternal attitude that had been her latest protection was slipping from her. He noted the pathetic doubt and uncertainty that darkened her eyes. Vaguely he grasped the idea that the girl was afraid, knowing, through his stupidity, of his colloquies with Blanche Mallory, that he might confuse her with Blanche.

At that realization he drew back a step from her. "I thank you for much, Mistress Lovewell," he said. "God keep you always!"

For the fraction of an instant he hesitated. Then it were hard to say which came first, her slight advancing of the hand, his slight movement forward, but in any case, her hand lay in his, and with a gallantry that was almost foreign to him, he bent his knee as he kissed her hand. Next moment he had flung the door open, and without a glance behind him, had passed forth from the house of Graystones.

CHAPTER X

INTERLUDE OF THE PARSON'S PASTY

THE household of Graystones, inured to thrifty and stirring habits, since Mistress Difficult came from Clegden to take up the reins of government, was afoot by six of the clock next morning. Bent on the congenial task of rattling the sleepy serving maids about their labor, Mistress Difficult was first belowstairs, and scarcely five minutes later Blanche Mallory and Althea Lovewell were speeding in her wake.

Both girls had lain sleepless for hours, both dreaded the discovery that morning must bring, both doubted their own power to maintain an innocent front, and both, fearing alike to delay in their chambers or to advance into the open, had at last, as the less of evils, decided to venture forth. There the resemblance between them ceased. Blanche, with a far greater stake in the game and a proportionate experience in the playing of it, was pale and pensive, but otherwise of a sweet and unruffled tranquillity, while Althea, as transparent a soul as ever dwelt in a girl's body, was nervous of gesture and harassed of expression.

So patent was Althea's distress that Blanche, overtaking her on the stair at the back of the house, was moved to comment. "You're white as my smock," said she. "You look as if you scarce had slept a wink this night."

"I have not," said Althea, tartly, and paused to wrestle with the unruly lace of her bodice. "I had a rending pain in my head that kept me wakeful."

More she might have been tempted to add by way of explanation, had she not caught at that moment the rising sound of hubbub in the kitchen, in which her Aunt Difficult's voice was plainly distinguishable. Instinctively Althea shrank back, and as she did so, noted that Blanche, on the same instinct, had clapped her hand to her heart.

Emboldened by the other's weakness, Althea laughed outright. "Come," said she, "let us go see what is amiss with my good aunt — unless you be afraid, Blanche."

"I? I have naught to fear!" Blanche cried, and thus, with confident faces and quaking hearts, the two guilty ones passed down the flagged passage and entered the kitchen.

There it was clear enough what had gone amiss — so clear that Althea almost wished that she had kept to the seclusion of her chamber. The cupboard stood wide, and on the lowest shelf, exposed to the gaze of all beholders, stood the bones of a mallard, the crust of a quartern loaf, and the empty dish that had contained a pasty.

With this sorry array for text and five gaping maids for audience, Mistress Difficult was holding forth with volume and power. "You thriftless, shameless slug-a-beds! No words, I pray you, no words! Never were good viands eaten without mouths to eat them — ay, and well I know what greedy mouths were these! Breaking of locks, too! 'Tis a sin that merits the bridewell, I'll give ye to know!"

"So please you, good mistress —" ventured the quaking cook maid.

"No words!" shrilled Mistress Difficult. "Do I not see with mine own eyes that the food is wasted and eaten — the loaf and the mallard, yea, even the mutton pasty that I had set aside for mine own son, Jarvis."

"And pray, good Sister Difficult," a small, sharp voice inquired, "wherefore in this house should cates and dainties be set aside for your son rather than for another?"

All, even Mistress Difficult, turned to the doorway, and there upon the threshold beheld Mistress Henrietta Heyroun. By the glint in her eye and the set of her little mouth she had not forgotten the insult offered her anent the spectacles.

So unexpected was the attack that for the moment Mistress Difficult was at a loss for a fitting reply. "Surely," she stammered, "there is no reason why my boy should go fasting in a house of plenty."

Mistress Henrietta, taking a leaf from her enemy's book, gave a womanly sniff.

"He rode yesterafternoon to Barbroke. He will return this morn nigh famished, and why should not his mother set aside the food he likes, he being of a delicate stomach?" urged Mistress Difficult, on the defensive, and then, seeing her weakness, shifted her ground. "And now they have unlocked the cupboard and devoured the food." She turned upon the serving maids. "Yea, they have devastated all — the wasters that they be!"

At this point Mistress Difficult's eloquence was stemmed by a sudden and unseemly altercation among her hearers. The cook maid, in despair of making herself audible, had started forward with something in her hand, whereupon the little scullery wench, a friend to Althea, indeed her only friend in all that household, had flung herself upon the woman. "No! No!" she shrilled desperately. "Thou shanna show't!"

Promptly the little wench was cuffed, and when she had fallen back blubbering, the triumphant cook maid thrust into her mistress's face her hand and what it held.

"What is it, hussy?" snapped Mistress Difficult.

"A clasp, an't like you. I found it lying by the hearth this morning."

In a silence broken only by the snuffing of the scullery wench, Mistress Difficult took the clasp, and turned it over and over,

while her face brightened slowly. In bare justice she took a moment for her scrutiny, but for Althea one glance sufficed. She knew what was coming, even before her aunt turned to her with the question: "You know this clasp, Althea Lovewell? How comes it here?"

"It is the clasp of my cloak," said Althea, simply. "I must have dropped it here last night."

She spoke slowly, but while she spoke, her brain perforce was working in frenzied haste. Until that moment she had reasoned lamely that, when her aunts discovered that food had been taken from the cupboard, they would instantly pitch upon the fugitive Jock as the culprit. Now, however, the loss of the food had been discovered before Jock's flight was known, and moreover, the finding of her cloak-clasp, the proof that she herself had been in the kitchen, made that explanation of the removal of the food most undesirable. Very clearly Althea saw how her aunts, how the whole unfriendly household, would enjoy the scandalous fact that she, the ever-distrusted daughter of a Cavalier, had erred at last, that she had been hobnobbing in the kitchen at one o'clock in the morning, with the scapegrace Hetherington whose very name was anathema.

In such a dilemma Althea took the only possible course, and resolutely bracing herself, prepared to shoulder the triple guilt of the loaf, the mallard, and the parson's pasty. "You sent me to bed without my supper," she finished her explanation with a scarcely perceptible pause. "I was hungry so I came belowstairs and unlocked the cupboard and ate what I could find."

Mistress Difficult stood silent, dumbfounded by the confession of such enormity, but Mistress Henrietta, who had crossed to the cupboard and scanned the silent witnesses of devastation, gave a horrified outcry: "Be merciful to us! The child has eat enough for ten! She'll surely die before our eyes."

"'Tis the greediest trollop!" cried Mistress Difficult.

"I — I gave some of the meat to the cat," faltered Althea.

"You did no such thing," interrupted Mistress Difficult.

"You spoiled and wasted all that you could find, for sheer spite, and my son's pasty in particular."

"And pray tell me, Sister Difficult," asked Mistress Henrietta, "why had not Althea Lovewell as good a right to the pasty as your precious son? Eat what you will, Althea, child. I've as good a share in the ordering of this household as has my sister Difficult. But I should counsel you go fasting this day and henceforth moderate your appetite."

"She shall go fasting this day, be sure," Mistress Difficult uttered a grim aside.

Althea chose to hear no further. She had gained a moment's respite, through the fickle kindness of her Aunt Henrietta, and she gladly seized on the chance to retire in good order. "Under your favor, aunt," — she courtesied to Mistress Henrietta, — "I'll go now to my task and feed the poultry," she said, and so saying, turned to the door.

In so doing, she passed close by Blanche, and she met squarely the wise, amused look of Blanche's eyes. "I think," said Blanche, under cover of the renewed wrangle between the two aunts, "I can name him with whom you shared yesternight."

"Thought is free," rejoined Althea, briefly, and with head erect passed out of the kitchen.

As she had announced, she set at once about feeding the poultry, one of the many tasks with which, from morning till night, she was busied in paying for the shelter that was grudgingly accorded her beneath that roof. She was wont to finish this task in a short time, but to-day she was long about it, for she took space in which to reflect upon her position. Plainly, she reasoned, Blanche knew that she had been with Jock Hetherington the last night. Therefore

Blanche must know of his escape. Therefore, as logically as a demonstration in Euclid, Blanche in her turn must have had speech with him the preceding night. Althea realized, in vulgar parlance, that she and Blanche were in the same boat. Neither, in safety, could bear tales of the other, but an enormous advantage would accrue to the one that first told her story.

But to that possibility Althea shook her head. All those weeks, since the June days when the hot-blood Captain Hetherington held Graystones, she had refrained from bearing tales of Blanche. She had told no word of the feet that had passed her chamber door in the night-time, no word of the alteration that with her woman's eyes she had marked in Blanche, in those brief days when Blanche, swayed by the first full-blooded passion that she had known, lowered her guard of prudence. Althea had told no word, partly because she had a kind of sex-loyalty, partly because she came of a race that was averse to talebearing.

With a tingle of race-pride Althea thought now of her father, blundering, thriftless, loyal Sam Lovewell. Poor daddy! He would not have liked her to screen herself by bearing tales, even of Blanche Mallory. No, she must hold her tongue, Althea decided, and then from the thought of her father her mind jumped to that not dissimilar blundering, piteous soldier-lad, whom she, at her own risk, had furthered. "In any case," said Althea, as she threw the last of the corn to the busy hens, "whatever come, I'm glad that I aided Hetherington."

With the thought of the soldier-folk she loved, she had so heartened herself that she decided to go look at the poor substitute she had at hand in Wogan's troopers. She made a circuit through the paddock, partly to avoid the spying windows of Graystones, partly to linger yet a little longer in the sweet air and the clear light of the morning, and so came at

length to the great stables. There she found six of the troopers saddling up, with a merry jingle of stirrup irons and a little clatter of hoofs and heavy boots upon the cobbles of the stable-yard.

Althea stood and surveyed the horses with a critical eye. "Where do you ride this morning, Farrat?" she asked presently.

The trooper that she had addressed, a Heronswood man by birth, grinned and touched his forelock. "To Bury, little mistress," he answered. "We're to convey that trim rascal Hetherington thither."

"Are you so, indeed?" Althea queried innocently. "I hope I may see you do it."

Then she walked lightly away, while Trooper Farrat, who was an unsuspecting fellow, made some comment to his mates on the revengeful disposition of women.

When Althea reached the great hall, she found that the storm, touching the parson's pasty, was well-nigh overblown. The household were about rising from table, and the men had matter in hand more important than a women's quarrel. "Lambert," said Inchcome, who was deliberately finishing a dish of eggs and collops, regardless of the visible impatience of the said Lambert and of Martin Heyroun, "an you will be stirring, do you go fetch Captain Hetherington. And, good Mistress Difficult, be in no such haste to have your table voided, for Hetherington has still to break his fast."

At that Lambert Wogan exclaimed impatiently, and Martin Heyroun saw fit to make a vigorous interposition. "Enough of this folly, Esdras!" he snarled. "That pestilent thief shall go fasting to Bury St. Edmund's."

"He will not go to Bury at all," Inchcome replied calmly. "The fellow may be a knave, but he is not a fool. He has dreamed whipping-posts all night, and this morning he will yield up your little deal box as peacefully as a child.

Go fetch him, Lambert, and see if I do not speak the truth."

Wogan gave a grumble of dissent, but though he grumbled, went as he was bidden. Althea watched till he had disappeared down the gallery above, and then, with a guilty terror lest every one read her secret in her face, turned away to the fire and began to tidy the hearth. Still, as she worked, she darted a glance at her kinsfolk — at her Aunt Difficult, fretting and scolding over some household matter, at her Uncle Martin, muttering even yet of Inchcome's folly, at her cousin Philip, the chestnut-haired, eating his breakfast with inscrutable face and lowered eyelids. She wondered what change would be wrought in those differing faces when Wogan came with his news, and, keyed high with apprehension, she fancied each moment that she heard Wogan's step and trembled at the sound.

But when the reality came, Althea wondered that she could have startled at her own imaginings. There was no mistaking the actuality of Wogan's approach. He came with an uproar that would have done credit to a squadron of dragoons, clattering down the passage in his heavy boots, clanging open the door at the end of the gallery, and leaning upon the balustrade, shouted in a voice that started the echoes in the vaulted roof of the hall, "He's gone — clean gone!"

For one moment Althea crouched upon the hearth, with her arms tight crossed upon her breast, while she felt that all eyes were seeking her. Then as the clamor rose about her, she turned fearfully and in the first glance realized that she was safe. It was to Wogan that all looked, on his head that the confusion poured. With a swift change of mood, Althea found herself a mischievous and amused spectator. To the full she enjoyed the incoherent wrath of her Uncle Martin, the bewilderment of the ever-sufficient Inchcome,

the shrill dismay of her Aunt Difficult. From them she glanced at Blanche and Philip. She saw that Blanche was pale, though quite unmoved, and she saw that Philip, lifting his eyes for the moment, wore on his face a look of absolute relief.

Then she gave ear to Wogan, who was explaining at the top of his lungs: "He's gone, I tell you! How do I know? The key of his door was in my pocket. I didn't let him forth. He's gone, and he's left a writing on the wall. He thanks us for the bed, but the board was not to his liking. 'Fore George, when I lay hands on him, he'll sing another song! I'll —"

"Enough, enough!" Inchcome cut him short, for he had mastered his surprise and first of them all had himself in hand again. "Come, Martin," he went on, "let us look about with our own eyes." So saying, he went briskly up the stairs, and behind him stumped Martin Heyroun, wrathful and puffing, and behind him still went the chestnut-haired Philip.

For a moment Mistress Difficult continued speechless, then she raised her voice. "'Tis a plot!" she cried. "'Tis a snare for the innocent and the defenceless! You have all connived at his escape. You think thus to rob my son of his lawful heritage." At this point the resolute gentlewoman gathered up her gown, and scurrying nimbly up the staircase, disappeared down the gallery in the wake of the men.

Mistress Henrietta said something about her poor head and the soothing properties of oil of lilies, and so saying, went from the hall and drove before her the staring servants that had crowded thither. Althea and Blanche, left thus alone, eyed each other with entire comprehension, across the width of the great hall. Althea gave a laugh of sheer nervousness, Blanche drew a tremulous, long sigh, and then, unnoticed where he had remained in the dark gallery, Wogan stepped

forward and came striding down the stair into the hall. He paid no more heed to Althea than if she had been a joint-stool, but tramping down the hall, stopped at Blanche's side.

"What do you know of this?" he asked point-blank.

"Of what?" she fenced weakly.

"Of the escape of your one-time friend, Captain Hetherington."

"A pretty question to ask me!" she answered, and raised her eyes to his with piteous coquetry.

"You had best throw fair with me," said Wogan, simply. "There's much I can forgive, knowing him for a rogue and you for an innocent maid."

Althea, unnoticed on the hearthstone, bit her lip.

"But you'd best be honest with me," Wogan finished.

"I have been wholly honest," Blanche answered, with a shrug of her fine shoulders. "I spoke once with Hetherington, with your approbation and free consent and for what purpose you know."

Unexpectedly to the one girl as to the other, Wogan turned on his heel and fronted Althea. "Mistress Mallory tells me," he blurted out, "that you, Mistress Lovewell, had speech aforetime with Captain Hetherington —"

"Lambert!" cried Blanche, and caught at his arm.

"And," pursued Wogan, "it was to serve you that she won me to connive at her having speech with the Captain, night before last. Now is this story true?"

With interest and something akin to amusement, Althea looked, not at Wogan, but at Blanche. In that moment she understood many things over which she had puzzled in the last weeks at Graystones, and she felt a sort of admiration for Blanche. Surely, it had been clever of Blanche to assign to another the part that she herself had played with Captain Hetherington. Perhaps, reasoned Althea, Blanche

deserved to have the truth of those June happenings told, and now were a good time to tell it.

At that moment Blanche, holding Althea's eyes, spoke gravely and quietly. "Althea knows," said she, "all that I might tell, were I to tell the truth."

On the verge of revelation, Althea paused. She knew what Blanche was hinting at, and she did not care to have her escapade of the preceding night made the common property of her kinsfolk. After all, what mattered these tales that Blanche told of her? Captain Hetherington was gone, and his bedevilled substitute was gone, presumably never to return, and she herself was in any case suspect and outcast among her kindred. A little more suspicion were easier to bear than to have the really innocent, but guilty seeming, facts of yesternight disclosed.

Althea gave a brief laugh. "Thanks be to Heaven," said she, "I am not betrothed to you, Captain Wogan, nor am I sib to you, so I know not by what patent you now question me."

"Then the story is true?" Wogan repeated.

"If it is not true," said Althea, turning again to her task, "Blanche has not spoke the truth, and 'twere a great pity, good Captain, that you should be bewitched of a liar and a wanton."

With her back turned, Althea could not see their faces, but she heard a sharp exclamation from Wogan, a murmur from Blanche, and then the little scene was played out, for Inchcome, well in the lead of his straggling company, came briskly across the gallery and descended to the hall.

"Bestir yourself, Lambert," Inchcome bade sharply. "Send a messenger post-haste to Phil, at the village, and bid him turn out the rest of your troop. Scour the country round. Make it known that whoever brings Hetherington in alive shall have ten marks. Be off with you, and mean-

time we'll have out the grooms and the serving men and search round about the house."

With such instructions Inchcome despatched the Captain and went about his self-appointed task. Within a quarter of an hour all the men had quitted Graystones, and the women, as best they could, took up the broken order of the day. Among the rest Althea went about her tasks, and if she seemed more distraught than her wont, her Aunt Difficult ascribed the fact to an uneasy consciousness of sin discovered, and her Aunt Henrietta to overindulgence in mutton pasty. Thus the day wore on, a day of fair sunlight and ripe odors, and under the sweet autumn weather the house of Graystones crouched waiting, alert, sensitive to every rumor that might come.

About two of the clock that afternoon Blanche and Althea went to their daily task of spinning. Their wheels stood in a long gallery at the eastern end of the second story of the house. One of the four casements looked to the south and the sun, but the sunlight was tempered by the rustling leaves of a great lime tree that stood by the window and cast a soft cloud of shadow on the bare floor of the gallery. By this window stood Blanche Mallory's wheel, and not ten paces distant stood Althea's. Up and down went the two girls, to all outward seeming intent upon their task, but in sober truth intent each upon fathoming the other's thought. But though in mind they labored over the same area, they interchanged no word for a full hour. A tense and palpable hostility enshrouded them, and each waited, as for an advantage, for the other to speak first.

The dogged patience of Althea Lovewell, granddaughter of a Lancashire Holcroft, at last won the day. Of a sudden Blanche turned to her companion, with a pretty gesture of appeal that she seldom wasted on a fellow-woman. "Althea," she pleaded, "why are you cruel to me?"

Althea raised her brows.

"You are young," sighed Blanche.

"'Tis no vice," quoth Althea.

"I am four and twenty," Blanche answered. She paused, and clasping her hands upon the rim of her great wheel, rested her chin upon them. "I wonder, child, if I can give you to understand."

"I doubt," said Althea. "I am not a man."

Blanche returned to her first assertion. "You are cruel to me. What words were those you spoke of me to Lambert Wogan?"

"The truth," said Althea, and her eyes did not waver from the other's face. "You are a liar. You lied about Hetherington's identity. You lied when you spoke with Hetherington, claiming for your father my dead father's services. You lied when you told to Wogan, to all in this house, what it seems you have told of me. And you are a wanton. Do not think, because I choose to be silent, that I am a child or a fool. I saw — what I have seen."

For a moment they faced each other across their silent wheels, and Blanche's face grew haggard. She had made the mistake, the common and fatal mistake, of underestimating her own sex. For the first time she realized all that Althea knew, and that Althea knew she knew, and the vast potency for harm that lay in that slip of a girl with the mop of hair and the direct eyes.

On sudden impulse Blanche stepped round her wheel and went straight to Althea. She spoke more simply, perhaps more honestly, than she had spoken in long months. "I am fain to tell you," she said, twisting her hands together. "I am not so evil as you believe. It is only — oh, I am not like you, Althea. I am hungry for all that women love — for brave gowns, and jewels, and the kindness and comfort of friends, and an honorable place in the world, the world

outside Graystones, where men and women move and deeds are done. What sin is there in me to desire this that so many women have and take unthankful? And why should I not have what others have? I come of gentle blood, I am not a fool, I am not uncomely."

"No," said Althea, honestly. "You are very fair to look on, Blanche."

The older girl smiled, for all that her face the moment before had been haggard and earnest. "You truly think so?" she asked, and emboldened by that praise, laid her hand on Althea's arm. "Then can you blame me? Do you realize how life has gone with me? My father died bankrupt, and I, a maid of fourteen, came here to Graystones to live on my aunt's charity. I might as well have come to a tomb. I have withered here, I have starved here. I sewed my aunt's endless seams, and I cooked her pottage, and brewed her drink, and listened to her sermons, the while the years passed and passed and my beauty was passing with them, and out there, so far, was the great world where I might not venture. And you despise me, you child, because I have sought the one way out — because I used my only portion, my beauty, to entice a husband. Do other maids do less with their lands and their great dowries? You are not just to me, Althea. I should be so good a wife, so obedient, so loving, so grateful to the man who would take me hence!"

"I wonder!" said Althea, and her eyes said more than her lips.

"Yes," Blanche answered the unspoken comment. "There have been divers men — no doubt there had been more, if more had come to Graystones. There was Philip Heyroun, but his sour-visaged mother looked well to the marring of that, and there was Lieutenant Phil, but that cold brother of his was too keen for me, and there was Lambert always,

and he is the best of them all. I — I do love him, Althea.” The last sentence rang false, for all that she uttered it with downcast eyes.

“There was also Captain Hetherington,” said Althea, unmoved.

This time Blanche faced her squarely and drew a long breath ere she spoke, then, “He is the one I loved,” she said simply. “He was — unlike the rest. I know not if he had any fortune. I care not. I would have gone away with him, had he asked me. I —” The girl’s eyes filled, brimmed over with tears that were not all artifice. “Well, he has gone,” she said with a tremulous smile, “and I am returned to — my old disgraceful trade, you call it, Althea? Lambert cares for me. He has money and land of his own, there at Barbroke, and a name that is held in honor in the countryside. He will take me away from this hateful place. Oh, Althea!” she sobbed in good earnest. “You will not rob me of this only chance? I can move Lambert as I list. He cares for me. In a little time I can bring him to make me his wife — if only you will not tell him what you know!”

Althea stood quiet. With knitted brows she looked at Blanche, who sobbed softly with her beauteous head bent upon her hands, and from Blanche she looked to the rustling leaves of the lime tree beyond the casement. She noted the little rifts of sunlight that filtered through the thick green of the branches. “In short,” she said abruptly, “you wish me still to let Lambert Wogan and the others think that ’twas I that loved Captain Hetherington.”

Blanche nodded, uplifting her eager, tear-marked face. “Only to be silent, that is all I ask,” she pleaded. “And, Althea, when once I am married to Lambert, I will stand your friend. You shall come dwell with me, dear, and I will find you a husband.”

"I thank you, but I would not have you pain yourself," Althea retorted.

"I understand." Blanche accepted the rebuke with meekness. "I know that you scarce need my offices. You can marry Jarvis Heyroun whenever you choose to say the word."

"Marry Parson Jarvis?" blazed Althea. "I'd die a thousand deaths first, for sure I'd die ten thousand afterward!"

Blanche looked at her, delicately puzzled. "He is his mother's whiteboy," she hinted. "In time she would forgive you. And he —"

Althea laughed, and set her wheel in motion with a swift turn of the hand. "'Tis of no use, Blanche," she said. "We see all with a difference. Perchance, seeing so differently, I have judged you overharshly."

"'Tis only that you are young," murmured Blanche.

Althea laughed again. "Marry Lambert, an you think him worth the trouble," she said. "I've no mind to mar your market. Marry him, and to accomplish your end, tell as few untruths of me as may be. I shall still be silent. In any case, you've done me no such wrong with your false tales as you did to Hetherington."

"Captain —" began Blanche.

"No," Althea cut her short, "the boy that escaped last night."

"That you helped to escape," said Blanche.

"You having already helped him," said Althea.

They looked at each other, and then in their own despite, smiled. "At least," urged Blanche, returning to her wheel, "you must admit I repaired the wrong I did to the young man. And the temptation — think but on that, Althea! The Captain, had they found him —"

"He might have borne tales to Wogan, of what truly happened in those days in June," Althea filled out the pause.

After a moment Blanche tacitly accepted the interpolation.

"This boy could not bear tales, even an he would. I was almost safe, while they thought that he was the Captain. I am wholly safe now that he has fled, and none may discover the truth as to his identity and seek to find and question the right Captain."

For a little time the two wheels whirled in busy company, then Althea, after grave pondering, questioned: "Your part is clear unto me, but, Blanche, can you guess why Philip Heyroun also should swear falsely to that boy's identity?"

"How can I?" Blanche asked. "Who knows Philip Heyroun's mind?" With returned courage she met Althea's eyes.

Althea asked no more, but to herself she said: "You are not telling the truth. I believe that Philip is silent, touching you and the Captain, at the price of your silence as to — what?" All she said aloud, however, was: "'Tis lucky on all hands that this same Hetherington has slipped away, but," she added, in the spirit of mischief, "how if he be retaken, Blanche?"

"Heaven forbid!" Blanche was startled into fervency. "'Twould undo all. Oh, but that will not be. The fellow is shrewd for his years."

There Blanche paused, with eyes on Althea, for Althea had sauntered to the eastern casement that looked down upon the stable-court, and gazing forth, she had grown pale.

"What is it?" asked Blanche, pressing to her side.

"It was Jarvis," said Althea. "I saw him fling off his horse and come toward the house. There is news. Oh, Blanche! If it be ill news!"

For an instant, forgetting their mutual distrust, the two girls clutched each other. They knew that Jarvis must have returned from Barbroke, which lay to the north of Heronswood, and they knew that Jock Hetherington's flight would be northward.

The older girl was first to master herself. "Come!" she said. "We must learn what has befallen that we may know what is next to do."

"I'm — frightened," gulped Althea.

"Nonsense!" said Blanche. "We know nothing, remember! We are two innocent maids, impelled by a worthy curiosity. Come!"

She caught Althea's hand in hers, and so, side by side, they hurried toward the great hall. When they set foot in the gallery, they realized that tidings must indeed have come. Mistress Henrietta, Mistress Difficult, and a distant fringe of eager serving wenches held the centre of the hall, and, a breathless newsmonger, in their midst stood Jarvis, all flushed and dusty.

"What news? What news?" cried Blanche, stopping halfway down the stairs. Her voice rang shrill and high, and the color was bright in her cheeks. "Have they taken him?"

"Ay, that they have!" shouted Jarvis.

Althea, standing on the step above Blanche, heard her gasp, "My heart!" and felt the warm pressure of the girl's shoulders swaying back against her. She stiffened herself, and throwing one arm about Blanche, listened to Jarvis's eager details.

"That is," Jarvis ran on, "they'll have taken him by now. They've run him to earth in the loft of a disused cottage, just this side of Barbroke. They'll have him out, or burn the cottage about his ears. Trust Lambert for that!"

"Oh!" moaned Blanche, so low that only Althea heard. "What will become of me?"

"Of you?" said Althea, in a bitter whisper. "What will become of him?"

CHAPTER XI

THE UNDER DOG

FROM the hour of his quitting Graystones Jock found that his fortunes hinged, most unheroically, on the fit of his boots. As long since was told, he had acquired them shortly after the fall of Colchester, by a forced exchange in which he had been the weaker party. They were old, they were worn, and, worse still, the trooper to whom they had belonged had had the bad habit of treading on the outer edge of the foot, while Jock, for his part, was accustomed to walk level. As long as Jock had stayed at St. Andrew's where the space for exercise was limited, he had scarcely noted the difference, but when once he had started on his long tramp to freedom he realized it with a vengeance.

At first, being, in the exhilaration of his new-won liberty, in the mood to be amused at anything, he was amused at the perverseness of his slantwise footgear. By the end of the second mile he was angry, and by the end of the third, when, thanks to his insecure footing, he just missed an ugly fall, he was downright alarmed. He knew that his safety now depended solely on his marching power, and that power was in direct ratio to the comfort and support that he could get from his boots.

With the coming of daylight Jock's difficulties increased. He was travelling north by west, bearing away from the sea, and he found that, following this course, he was about to walk squarely into a village. Round this danger spot he

made a circuit, but even so he had to pass through a country of cultivated fields and unexpected lanes and byways, — a country, too, where husbandmen were going about their labors. He no longer dared walk boldly, as he had done in the night-time, but lost precious moments in skulking along in the shelter of hedges or of copses, and even so, he more than once narrowly avoided an encounter with chance wayfarers.

Still, all this was so much a part of the game of being a fugitive that Jock could have kept up his courage, had he only been able to walk at his proper pace, but each hour he found himself lagging more and more. Not only was he hampered and retarded by his miserable boots, but he grew painfully aware that one good meal was not enough to wipe out the effect of weeks of half rations, topped by two days of actual starving. Already, though he had come so few miles, he was wearied well-nigh to the point of exhaustion. He ceased to say, "When I escape," and instead used the phrase, "If I escape," and the moods that went with the two phrases differed even more widely than the phrases themselves.

Partly because he wished to save steps, partly because he felt, in his discouragement, that all precautions were futile, Jock began soon to take desperate chances. He cut across open fields, he passed within a stone's cast of stray cottages, and he even tramped for a few rods at a time along the unfrequented highway, where he found the walking easier. Through such foolhardiness he came, inevitably and deservedly, by his undoing. About eleven of the clock in the morning, as he was trudging along the highroad some fourteen miles north of Graystones, he reached a spot where on the right hand was a thick hedge, and on the left a steep bank, sloping to a little brook. It were a bad place in which to be caught, he reflected, and so thinking, rounded a sharp turn and came face to face with two country fellows.

"Yon's our man!" cried the foremost of the two, and next

moment Jock found himself in the thick of a bout at fisticuffs.

He knocked one man down, and then he felt himself seized by the neck of his doublet. With sudden thanksgiving that the doublet was too big for him, he twisted out of it, and leaving it in the hands of his would-be captor, took to his heels. To break through the hedge was impossible; to jump down the bank, in those unsteady boots, meant to fall and be captured. Of necessity he stuck to the road. He heard behind him the shouts of his pursuers, but they seemed not to gain upon him. For an instant he had a hope that the impossible might happen, and, tired though he was, that he might still outrun them. Then from before him he heard an answering shout. He lifted his head, and there in the roadway, not five rods from him, were two mounted troopers, and one of them was Lieutenant Phil Heyroun.

If it had been another than a Heyroun, Jock might perhaps have done the reasonable thing, and seeing that the whole countryside was roused and that he was taken between two fires, might have surrendered himself with what grace was at his command. But when he saw Phil Heyroun, grinning at the prospect of his ignominious capture, Jock made up his mind that he was not to be captured. For an appreciable second he halted short, glancing desperately from the bank to the hedge. Then he had spied what he prayed for — a thin spot in the hedge — and putting his head down, he charged into it.

By the favor of fortune he broke through. Before him he saw a little knoll on which stood a deserted cottage, with crumbling thatch and shutterless windows and a door that sagged wide. He breasted the knoll, crashing through the briars and weeds of the neglected house-yard. Beyond the knoll stretched a great expanse of broken land, with clumps of trees and a distant wood that gave promise of shelter, but

already Phil Heyroun and his trooper were swinging in on their horses to cut him off from that haven, and behind him the countrymen were breaking through the hedge. With a wild notion that within the cottage he should at least have a wall against which to set his back in the final struggle, Jock wheeled and stumbled panting into the deserted house.

In the sudden change from sunlight to semidarkness he saw no more of the one room than a fireplace, yawning opposite him, a closed door beside it, and to the right a ramshackle ladder that led through an opening to the loft above. For Jock it was now a case of any port in storm. Breakneck he dashed across the quaking floor and hurled himself upon the ladder. He heard a round crack beneath his foot, but in that moment he caught at the edge of the loft and heaved himself upward into the heat and darkness. Struggling to his feet, he seized the uppermost rounds of the ladder, and contrived to drag it after him into the loft, just as he heard his pursuers tramp into the room below.

The vanishing foot of the ladder gave a clew to Jock's whereabouts that would have been sufficient to the dullest mind. "Come down!" shouted Phil Heyroun.

"Come up!" panted Jock, and wasted no time in further speech. Working as he had never worked in a life that had not been idle, he tugged and wrenched till he had torn the broken round from the ladder. By this means he was furnished with a cudgel some eighteen inches long and almost as thick as his wrist, as ugly a short range weapon as heart could desire. With this in hand, he waited and drew breath.

To all appearance the besiegers had taken counsel and now were ready for action. Jock heard Phil's voice say encouragingly, "He's not armed, I tell you!" and next moment saw the head of the trooper appear at the opening.

Jock struck at the head with all the force of his cudgel and two arms behind it. The trooper, being a man of discrimi-

nation, sacrificed his arm to save his skull, and taking thus the force of the blow, toppled off the shoulders of the countrymen who supported him and landed sprawling on the floor. "Ben't he armed, though!" Jock heard him say ruefully.

Lieutenant Phil seemed to be convinced by this demonstration. He halted beneath the opening and set forth his opinion of Jock and his intentions as to his future, but he made no further effort to scale the loft. In conclusion, growing cooler, he ostentatiously bade his followers go bring assistance, and saying that one man were enough to keep watch, marched noisily away. A moment later Jock heard the sound of receding horse-hoofs and felt the great silence that settled on the cottage. Being of a perverse and evil temper, he grinned and wondered if Lieutenant Phil really thought to catch him with such chaff.

Now that he had a little time at his disposal, Jock strengthened his position by stretching the ladder across the opening. The strong rounds made still narrower the straitened space through which a man must pass. That way, at least, he had made his place of refuge impregnable, but he was wofully ignorant of what might threaten him from other quarters, for there were no windows in the loft, nor so much as a rift in the thatch through which he might overlook the enemy's movements. Worse still, he dared not explore the loft to learn its advantages and disadvantages as a fortress, for he discovered that the flooring was old and treacherous — so treacherous that, on the one occasion when he ventured a little distance from the opening, he just missed crashing through into the room below. Of necessity he settled himself again at his sentinel duty, and having the virtue of patience, ate the last of his bread and meat while he waited for what should come next.

The cottage faced to the west, and the sunlight, striking through the windows, slipped presently along the floor and

gave Jock a rough notion of the time. It was about two o'clock, he judged, when Lieutenant Phil gave over the fond hope of beguiling him from his place of vantage and tramped into the cottage, and from that time on people kept coming, and none went away. Round the beleaguered house Jock heard the stir of many folk, the buzz of men's voices, the shouting of lads, the stamp of horses, and now and again, in the room below, he heard footsteps, as some newcomer of greater place and authority strode in to speak with the Lieutenant.

From the scraps of talk that floated to the loft Jock decided that he had not done wisely in seeking cover at that particular spot. As nearly as he could discover, the village of Barbroke, on the outskirts of which the cottage stood, was peopled exclusively by the Wogans and their relations by marriage, the Cookes. Thanks to this kinship with Captain Wogan, the whole countryside was rallying to help him recover his prisoner. This was bad, but presently Jock found that bad could be worse. From the rising murmur of the crowd, and the outspoken threats of the men in the room below, he learned that his cousin, the Captain, had ridden a-foraying once in these parts and that his memory still was green among the country folk. To put the matter mildly, Captain Hetherington was not a favorite at Barbroke, and it was Captain Hetherington that Jock had now the questionable honor to represent.

As he listened to the voices that rose, more and more stormily, round his place of refuge, Jock told himself, with a streak of prudence, that his wisest course would be to surrender to Captain Wogan the instant that the soldiery came up. It were better to endure the military brutalism of the captain, than to suffer the manhandling of the angry crowd, he reasoned, but when at length he heard outside the heavy tramp of horses and the brisk jingle of sound that meant the dismounting of cavalry, he sent reason to the right-about. He

would surrender to no man, and least of all to Lambert Wogan, who had twice mishandled him. As long as life was in him, he would fight against recapture, and having decided in this wise what he was to do next, he was ready, with no harassment of doubt or self-question, to do it.

Jock had no long time to nurse his belligerent intent. Not five minutes after the troopers had dismounted in the house-yard, Captain Wogan himself strode masterfully into the space beneath the opening. "Hetherington, you runagate!" he ordered. "Come down, else we'll fetch you down!"

Jock laughed. "Your lieutenant said that afore," he retorted. "My good Lambert, repetitions are wearisome and oftentimes unadvisable."

This tactful quotation from Inchcome had the desired effect of infuriating Captain Wogan beyond the point of prudence. Better than Jock's expectation, he called to his troopers to give him a shoulder up, and with a foolhardy courage that deserved — and won! — applause from his kinsmen and neighbors, attempted to scramble into the loft.

For the second time that day Jock uttered a pious thanksgiving, and as he saw Wogan's head come through the opening, brought down his cudgel upon it. He saw the blood gush over Wogan's forehead, but Wogan still clung pluckily to the edge of the loft. Jock struck a second blow, and at that Wogan swayed, let go his hold, and so dropped limply down into the arms of his men.

In the next few moments Jock had indeed to make his hands keep his head. Irregularly, tumultuously, Wogan's troopers, reënforced and thereby much hindered by Wogan's kinsmen, tried thrice to carry the loft by assault. There was an uproar of shouts and threats, a wild shot or two, a scrambling and jostling of men, but Jock, although deafened with confusion and half stifled with smoke, still had eyes to see and a single purpose to cling to. Whenever he saw a

head appear at the opening, he battered it with his cudgel, and before he was exhausted, Lieutenant Phil had given the order for the sorely mauled assailants to draw off.

There followed for Jock a half hour of tense and painful apprehension, during which he knelt by the opening, alert for the first movement of surprise. He listened to the murmur of the crowd and the stamp of horses outside of the house, while he strained his ears to catch the first sound of a foot-step in the room below. At last he heard a step indeed, and without surprise saw Wogan once more standing in his old place.

Wogan was hatless, and about his forehead he had twisted a handkerchief that was flecked with red. He was white to the lips, and he spoke less blusteringly than before, but in a far more deadly tone. "If you are not down ere I count ten," he said, "I'll burn the house about your ears."

Again Jock laughed, baring his teeth. "Burn an you will!" he scoffed. "And then you can whistle for your plaguy little deal box!"

Unerringly Jock had hit upon the weak point in any plan for his dislodgement. Lieutenant Phil, a possible beneficiary under the missing wills, came at once to Wogan's side. "That won't do, sir, that won't do at all," he protested. "Say we try gunpowder?"

"Do you want to blow him to hell?" rejoined Wogan. "No, no! Curb yourself a little longer, Phil. I know how to fetch him down."

Without further words or threats, the two men tramped out of the house, and this omission made Jock far more uneasy than anything that they could have said. As the moments passed and his blood cooled, he began to wonder if after all he had behaved as cleverly as he had thought. In the closely invested cottage, with the mutter of the crowd always in his ears, he found it hard to keep up his courage.

He realized that he was tired, and half suffocated with the heat of the close loft, and, thanks to the food that he had eaten, faint and almost sick. Overborne by this faintness, he sank down by the opening which he must guard, and in such posture watched the sunlight, the only moving thing in the cottage, creep farther and farther along the floor.

Incredible though it sounds, he must have dozed by snatches. In any case, while he was telling himself feverishly that the afternoon would never end and he cared not how it ended, so the end came speedily, he opened his eyes with a start, and saw that the room below, no longer sunlit, was dim with coming twilight. In the same moment — the sound that must have roused him — he heard a clatter of horses hard at hand and a noise of cheering. Alert once more, he rose to his knees, and as he made the movement, clapped his hand to his suddenly dazzled eyes. Below, he had caught a glimpse of red light, streaking the dusk, and he could smell the acrid smoke of torches.

“Heave the light higher!” came Wogan’s voice. “Look to’t that he does not slip through. Now then! Tightly, lads! All with a will!”

Above him Jock heard a sound of creaking and rending. Upon his head and face he felt a rain of dust and splinters, and again he heard the rending, tearing noise, and upon it a shout of furious exultation. Brushing the litter from his face, he looked up, and above his head he looked through a gaping hole straight into the evening sky.

He understood now. Wogan had sent for poles and hooks and was unroofing the house above his head. It was clever of Wogan. If he had stood in Wogan’s place, he would have been proud of the device.

So far Jock reasoned impersonally, and then, with a sudden, choked cry, he realized that this was no impersonal happening. It was he that they were hunting. It was he that was

at bay, trapped, soon to be dragged out by that exultant mob. He sprang to his feet, just as another section of thatch went hurtling into the yard below. "You scurvy cowards!" he raged, and in the tumult of crashing roof and shouting men, might as well have raised his voice against a hurricane.

On the mere instinct of a hunted animal he shrank away from the unroofed space by the opening, back into the sheltering darkness of the loft. As he retreated he felt the rotten flooring sway beneath his feet. He halted on the safe footing that a cross beam afforded, and looked about him. All round were cracks and chinks in the boards through which he could see the play of red torchlight in the room beneath, but at his left hand he spied a little space that was dark. He dropped to his knees and groped about the spot. Yes, the floor was broken here. He tore away a couple of loose boards, and still the space beneath was black. It might prove a place of refuge; it might prove a hideous living grave. At that moment a third section of the roof went down. Jock had a nightmare glimpse of the house-yard, where the lurid torchlight played on the upturned faces of men, mad with the lust of the hunt. At that sight he swung his legs over the edge and dropped recklessly into the black pit beneath.

For one second he felt a support under his feet, and then, with a crash that was drowned in the louder crash of the unroofing, he heard the support give way, and he fell again. This time he must have lain for a moment half stunned. When he opened his eyes he saw a flicker of red light on a rude wall beside him, and he realized what had happened. From the loft he had dropped into a dark closet, and from the closet, the floor of which had broken under his weight, he had fallen into a cellar.

So far, good, Jock reflected, and shaken though he found himself, was rising from the pile of rubbish where he lay, when he heard in the yard above an ominous shout: "Fire!"

and next moment the voice of Phil Heyroun: "Help hither! Briskly! One of these pestilence fools has fired the house!"

Then above in the yard Jock heard a sound of running and shouting, and for one hideous second he heard his own voice, high-keyed with terror, shouting too. Small blame to him, if for that instant he could realize only that he was caught in the cellar like a rat in a trap, while over his head the tinder-box of a cottage was burning. Of that last horror he had no doubt, for he could see the fire redden through the chinks of the floor above him and the red reflections waver across the cellar. Like a trapped rat indeed, he ranged frantically up and down the narrow space, but soon, as he recovered his self-control, he ranged to some purpose. There must be a way out, he reasoned, and if he would not perish miserably, he must find that way.

In that moment of regained self-mastery Jock saw, by the flickering light, a ruinous door set in the wall at the farther end of the cellar. He flung himself upon it, thrusting his shoulder against the stubborn wood, wrenching at the lock with frenzied hands. He felt the hot wind from a bit of wood that fell blazing from the floor above and barely missed his head. With the hot blast still upon his face, he threw his last strength into one final effort that heaved the rotten door from its hinges.

Beyond the door he saw yawning what seemed a passageway, and headlong he pressed into it. He felt that the ground was uneven beneath his feet. Again and again he stumbled as he went forward, and to save himself groped his hands along the rough wall, but soon, unless it were his fancy, he began to see the way before him, dimly at first, and then with greater clearness. He raised his face, and felt a branch of growing leaves brush against his cheek.

Behind the bush that screened him he paused, and slowly blinking the dust and darkness from his eyes, looked about him.

He stood in the mouth of a short passageway, half hidden by hazel and alder bushes, that opened into a narrow gully. On either side fell away the knoll on which the cottage stood, and the glare of the blazing structure reddened the quiet sky and the fields. So far the fire had not seized on the eastern side of the building where the passage lay, but the western front must be blazing fiercely. He could hear the shouts of the men who were fighting the flames, but he saw not a single straggler. He realized then that in the excitement of quenching the blaze his persecutors had broken their cordon and left the eastern side of the house to all purposes unguarded. Here was his way of escape. The fire that had promised to be his ruin was instead his salvation.

Bending low, Jock scurried down the little gully, keeping well to the shadow of the alders. Once and again he started, as he heard a stone clatter beneath his foot, but up on the knoll they were making too much noise to heed so slight a sound. Unmarked, he reached the safe shadows of the fields beyond the farthest range of the firelight. He remembered the wood that he had noted earlier in the day, and heading thither, walked at his best speed. Even so, he went but slowly. By the time that he had gained the outlying trees, the roof of the blazing cottage had fallen.

For a moment Jock gazed at the red glow on the knoll, a half mile distant, and then he withdrew his eyes to the sky, where beyond the feathery lines of the elm-branches the stars were pricking through. Upon his sweaty forehead he felt the stirring of the night wind and the coolness of the dew that fell with the fall of twilight. Of a sudden he dropped down in the shelter of the trees, with his face pressed into the moss that was cool and wet, and lying thus, realized, to his own amazement, that he was almost sobbing with passionate thanksgiving for the release that at the eleventh hour had been granted him.

CHAPTER XII

A GUEST UNLOOKED FOR

Nor four and twenty hours later Jock Hetherington, who had been born north of the Humber and hence looked to gain his pennyworth at every bargain, was begrudging his mood of tearful thanksgiving as wrung from him under false pretences. He was free, yes; but freedom with the drawbacks of an empty stomach and knees that knocked together with weariness was not all that blithe fancy had painted it. Moreover, he was not likely to enjoy even such poor freedom for any long time. Only too sensibly was he aware that he had upon his trail the entire southern half of the county, and leading them on was Captain Wogan, who by now, what with his broken head and his public bafflement, must be in a sweet temper.

"I misdoubt but I was overhasty to batter Wogan," Jock reflected with the futile prudence of afterthought.

He was sitting, as he made this reflection, on the ivy-grown trunk of a fallen oak, in the depth of a tangled hollow, some eight miles distant from the point where he had entered the wood. Round him the steep sides of the hollow reared themselves, close-grown with beeches and young oaks that shut out the sky and let no more than a glint of the western sunlight slip between their lowest branches. To all appearance, he had chosen a safe hiding-place, but he had not spent the day in acquainting himself with the wood to be deceived by mere appearance. He was well aware that this unworthy forest was not more than three leagues in length and at its

widest scarce a league in breadth, and beyond its outermost verge was fair open country with barley fields, where mowers swung their scythes, and open heath where maids kept cows, and little obtrusive hamlets and farmsteads that thrust themselves into the very shadow of the trees. Up and down this sweet open country, on all hands, as his eyes had been witness, mounted men and footmen were scouring, and he guessed only too shrewdly what quarry it was that they sought.

"If I venture forth of the wood," reasoned Jock, dispassionately, "even with the night to cover me, I am like to be instantly captured. If I sit here, I shall presently starve with hunger. What's to do?" Unable to answer his own question, he puckered his lips and fell to whistling soundlessly.

In the midst of his whistling he came by an answer that he had neither expected nor desired. At a distance among the trees, but each moment nearer, he caught the sound of slow-pacing horse-hoofs, and he had barely time to drop behind the tree trunk on which he had been sitting, when there rang from the slope above him a loud halloo. For a tense moment he believed himself discovered, and then, at a farther distance in the wood, he heard an answering hail, and breathed again.

Very cautiously he raised his head, and peering through the leaves that masked his hiding-place, saw on the western ridge of the hollow, not twenty paces from him, a mounted trooper, halted and waiting. For all the low-growing branches and the shifting leaves of the beech trees that intervened, he could make out the steel cap that gleamed on the man's head and the well-curried dark flank of the horse. He saw the steel cap shift, the dark flank quiver restlessly, and warned by such signs, looked more nearly, and saw through the interstices of the leaves bits of a brown smock frock and an unkempt head of sun-bleached hair. Even before he caught a spoken word, he guessed that a hind, summoned by the trooper's shout, had come to his stirrup.

Said the man in the saddle: "How far is't, fellow, to Draycote farm? I'm fair mazed in your wood." His voice reached Jock, clear and distinct upon the quiet air of sunset.

"Less nor a mile, an't like you," the hind made answer. "'Tis the red-roofed house, yonder at the edge of the wood. Fecks, I can lead ye thither, an ye will. I serve Mr. Heyroun that is master of Draycote."

"'Tis for him I bear a message," replied the trooper. "He'll have guests this night."

At last the hind, so seeming stupid, was charmed to interest. "Tell me, master," he begged, "have ye taken that slipper rogue Hetherington? Cuds me! but I had good hope myself to earn ten marks by taking him alive."

The trooper laughed, throwing back his head in the steel cap. "Those ten marks will fall to the lads in buff coats," he said. "Look you not thither, cudden. We have sent unto Graystones for leamers, and we have Hetherington's cast doublet that he, of his civility, left in our hands. We'll run the murderous thief to ground like a badger."

So saying, the trooper swung his horse about, and for an instant Jock was in fear lest he ride down the slope over the very spot where he was lying. For his escape from this peril he had to thank the unconscious hind who, crying out that the way was easier along the top of the ridge, struck into a path that bore away from the hollow. After him went the trooper, and left a wake of wavering boughs that his passage had displaced, and an echo of boasting as to the speed with which he and his mates would run to earth the fugitive Hetherington.

When the wood became silent again and the shaken leaves hung motionless, Jock sat up behind the sheltering tree trunk. He did not whistle now, not even to keep up his courage. White-lipped and clench-fisted he sat silent while he pondered the knowledge that he had won. So they were promising

ten marks for his recapture, a noble sum, a sum that would keep every man in the hundred from his bed that night, alert, watchful, a sum that would outweigh any lingering scruple of compassion in the hearts of the thrifty country folk. To that, they meant to track him with dogs.

"The cowards!" Jock raged, much as, the evening before, he had raged with the sense of his own helplessness and of Wogan's insolent strength at the moment when the roof was torn from above his head, and then, in the thick of the madness that began to turn the world red before his eyes, he be-thought him of the words that the hind first had uttered, of Draycote and of Heyroun.

Suddenly, linking one phrase to the other, Jock recalled Althea Lovewell's account of her dark kinsman, Rafe Heyroun, who dwelt at Draycote farm. Next moment, almost without reflection, he rose to his feet and headed down the hollow, eastward, in the direction that the trooper and the hind had taken. Whichever way he turned he was sure of capture, — he faced, with wonted hard-headedness, his immediate need, — and better far to yield himself a prisoner to Rafe Heyroun than to the brutal peasantry or to Wogan and his troopers. He saw a chance, albeit a slender one, that he might win some measure of protection from Rafe, who on that night at Graystones alone had seemed capable of pity, and if this poor hope was frustrate, at least he should have the comfort — and in his own wretchedness it was a comfort! — of making a fellow-being wretched. He had it in mind to convince Rafe Heyroun that it was not so easy as he had dreamed to stifle his doubt, for laziness or for a family scruple, and wash his hands of the man whose identity he had himself once called in question.

At the thought of the coming encounter with Rafe Heyroun, Jock smiled, not altogether pleasantly, and strode forward at a brisker pace. Under dim trees that grew farther

and farther apart he trudged until, between the trunks, he had a glimpse of open spaces where the waning light fell stronger, and at last gained the edge of the dwindled wood. Before him, a sight that already he once had viewed that day, he saw the long, gracious slope of barley fields and dusky meadows that stretched away to the twilight east, where rose the roofs and the church tower of a hamlet, and close at hand, not forty rods upon his right, he made out, nested among low hillocks, the red roofs of a farmhouse, with a huddle of thatched outbuildings and walled orchards that jostled one another forth into the fields.

That must be Draycote farm, Jock decided, mindful of the hind's description, and warily he set himself to cross the fields that lay between him and his chosen haven. As he went, he marked that the light grew paler and that the sunshine, that had glowed like fire on the uppermost windows of the farmhouse, faded and died. In the sombreness of the first twilight he reached the wall of the farthest orchard, and along it he scouted till he came to a green door that, as an omen of good luck, so he was pleased to read the sign, stood a little ajar. Through this door he entered the dusky orchard, and under the deep shadow of the pear and bullace trees drew toward the dim pile of the farm buildings. On the hushed evening air he could hear now the lowing of cattle and, once and again, the harshly raised voices of men, at their tasks in the stable-court.

At the sound Jock halted, safe in the shadow of the trees, and told himself that this was the moment when he should reflect soberly and decide whether it were better to go forward or, since he still was undiscovered, to slip back and run his chances in the wood. Dutifully he waited for several minutes, but instead of weighing his arguments, pro and con, as he should, he found himself staring upon a spray of climbing rose that showed above the western wall and studying, with

entire interest, the little wind-shaken movement that it made against the saffron sky.

Vexed at his childishness to pause, as of duty, when he knew that already, come weal, come woe, his decision was taken, he plunged forward again, and soon, in his headlong march, found himself on the edge of the rick-yard. Across this danger spot he contrived to steal unobserved, though he passed some breathless moments behind a rick of straw, while he listened to a stable-lad chaffing a belated dairy wench. When the two fools, as he termed them, were gone at last, he went forward in the thickening dark, crossed the stableyard, and approached the house, where lights were beginning to gleam in the latticed windows.

With a half-humorous sense of the strangeness of his position, he was wondering what he should do under the circumstances, whether he should knock at the house-door civilly, or stride in forthright, or lurk hidden in the shadows to see if, by happy chance, Rafe Heyroun himself might stray in his direction, when in an instant all his doubts were resolved. Right upon him, as it seemed, in the dim lane that ended at the stable-court, he heard the tread of horses and then a voice that he would have known among a thousand, Captain Wogan's voice, shouting to his men to halt and in the same breath calling irritably for a light.

All in an instant Jock comprehended the trooper's speech that he had overheard in the wood, touching the guests that were to be looked for that night at Draycote. He realized but too well that Wogan and his men, wearied and ill-tempered with searching for him, had sought the very shelter that he, in his folly, had sought, and in that realization he went out of the stable-court, with the simple purpose of getting as far away from Wogan as kind fate would suffer him.

As usual, fate was not fighting on Jock's side. Out of the stable-court was into a little space of garden, bounded on the

left by a tall hedge of quickset, and on the right and straight ahead by the walls of the farmhouse itself, a veritable blind alley, as Jock realized with dismay. Behind him he heard the stamp of horses right at his heels, and looking across his shoulder, he saw a flare of light broaden in the stable-court, where the farm servants were hastening to bring torches. In a moment the bare little garden where he stood would be in a bath of light, and Wogan would be upon him.

At that pass of desperation Jock made out in the wall of the farmhouse above him a casement that opened on the blackness of a room within. Once again it was for him out of the frying-pan, even at the imminent risk of the fire. Making a wild spring, he caught at the sill with his upflung hands, found foothold in the plastered wall, and heaved himself over the window-ledge into the room, just as the glare of the torch-light blazed across the little garden that he had quitted.

Stretched upon the floor, where he lay breathless and shaken with his frantic scramble, Jock watched the light waver across the room, a long, low parlor, sparsely windowed and hung in the fashion of an earlier generation with faded arras. Hard by him stood an oak table with heavy carven feet, and catching a gleam of light reflected back from the dimness, he looked more closely and saw that the table was laid for supper with dishes and tankards of polished pewter. With a dawning suspicion he sat up, and at that moment heard a step without and spied a crack of light in the opposite wall that betrayed the whereabouts of a door.

"Mind the flagon, Bess, thou ungain hussy!" spoke a woman's voice upon the very threshold, and from his heart Jock gave thanks to the unknown Bess and her ungainness, for while the mistress paused to rail upon the wench, he had time to seek shelter.

Of a truth, he needed little time, for he had no troublesome decisions to make. He could not well leave by the win-

dow, for that meant to risk himself in the lighted garden, in full view of the stable-court where Wogan's men were dismounting. Accordingly, he stayed where he was, and as he saw no sign of other hiding-place, bestowed himself behind the arras. He found the space narrow and he reflected that he had once more, even as on the night when he crawled through the window of the roof room, to thank the days of semistarvation that had fitted him for packing into tight corners.

Wedged between the wall and the arras, Jock listened to the go and come of women's feet and the rattle of dishes. He was conscious of a glow of light that made him blink and he wondered whence it came, till presently he realized that he had taken his stand at a spot where the arras at the level of his face was worn thin. He was able, then, to take a somewhat blurred survey of the room, and he discovered first, to his joy, that, choosing blindly, he had chosen his hiding-place well. He was ensconced in a corner behind a high-backed chair, the thick shadow of which fell upon the arras even to the height of his shoulder. Reassured as to his present safety, he gazed about him, at the low ceiling, crossed with heavy beams, at the dark floor that caught the reflection of the light, at the table set forth for supper, where candles now were shining, and at the women who were setting the meat upon the board. The one was, by every sign, a mere unhandy serving wench; the other was a tall, comely matron, mistress of the house, by the keys at her girdle, and by that token, Rafe Heyroun's wife, and Lambert Wogan's sister.

Of the truth of this identification Jock was speedily assured. In the hall without he heard a clatter of heavy steps and a clank of spurs, and then, up the short flight of stairs that he could see ascended from the hall, came Captain Wogan, bandaged of head and stiff of gait, and at his heels, dark, taciturn as ever, came Rafe Heyroun. By the subdued

sounds in the hall, Wogan's hungry troopers were set at supper there, while Wogan was himself retired to the greater seclusion of the farmhouse parlor. He sat down at the table, and Rafe sat opposite him, and Mistress Heyroun sat between them with her back toward Jock, and in such posture they made their supper, a very good supper of a breast of mutton stewed with parsnips, and white puddings, and nettle cheese, and ale.

Hungrily and enviously Jock checked off each item, while with his finger-tips he beat a soundless tattoo upon the wall against which he leaned. From his heart he wondered if, had Wogan done all of set purpose, he could have succeeded in making him more miserable than he was at that moment. What with the smell of the food, after his long fast, and the dread of his coming interview with Rafe that, in this forced inactivity, gained upon him, he felt a mortal terror lest again, as he had done two nights before in the Graystones kitchen, he should disgrace himself by fainting. Indeed, for moments on end he lost the voices of the three at table, and was conscious only of the ebbing within him of the strength that with all his soul he struggled to call back.

It was after one such lapse that Jock grew tinglingly aware of Wogan's speech: "Well, we didn't burn Hetherington living, whatever story your hinds brought you, Rafe. You can't burn a man, body and bones and buttons and all, you'll bear me witness, and we searched through the ashes of that hut and found no trace of —"

"Nay, Lambert!" protested Mistress Heyroun, weakly, and from that point ceased eating.

"But we did find an outlet whereby he could well have escaped from the cellar," Wogan continued. "So we did not burn him, but I tell you, Rafe, that when I get my hands on him, he'll wish that we had! I've a score of mine own now

to settle with the rascal. Two thumping licks in the head he dealt me and —”

“And what else did you look for the fellow to do when you thrust your foolish head into the loft?” Rafe Heyroun asked with a note of amusement in his tone that did not square with Jock’s preconceived idea of a Puritan. “Sure, you did not look for him to embrace you like a brother and fall a-weeping on your neck?”

Thereupon Wogan thrust back his stool and rose from table, with an inarticulate growl, like a sore-headed bear, and Mistress Heyroun cried, “Fie upon you, Rafe, to make a jest of that red-hand villain’s misdeeds, he that has well-nigh slain our brother Lambert!”

This statement of fact seemed not overpleasing to Captain Wogan, for he wheeled and glared upon his sister. “Nothing of the sort, Bel!” he said stiffly. “’Twill take a taller fellow than that empty swinebuckler to do me damage. Give you good night! I must be stirring early on the morrow.”

With such curt speech Wogan left the room, and at his departure Jock drew his first long breath in an hour. Almost he was minded to step forth at once while Rafe was amused and hence in the mood to be tolerant, but he lingered, half because he dreaded to put his last hope to the test, half because he feared to face Rafe’s wife, who loved her damaged brother. So for moment after moment he delayed, while Isabel Heyroun rose from her place and closed the casement that still stood wide to the night wind, and snuffed a candle that was guttering. Then she stepped to her husband’s side and lit the pipe that meantime he leisurely had filled.

“Art angered with me, eh, sweetheart?” said Rafe, with his dark face keen and kindly in the glow of the candle that Isabel held to his pipe bowl.

“Nay,” she answered, “not long angered, but indeed I

marvel how you can speak as if you did not condemn that outcast ruffian Hetherington."

Rafe moved his tankard with an impatient hand, and if it were not a trick of Jock's imagination, knit his brows in a passing frown. "Truth," said he, but not in so light a tone as plainly he had striven for, "there are folk enough to condemn this luckless Hetherington. I've no need to fill up the cry."

Said Isabel: "Whatever befall him, he has well deserved it. Remember how he did abuse our only son, my harmless little Philip."

"Mere rough play," Rafe answered curtly, "too rough for so young a child, wherefore I would have seen this galliard Hetherington himself ducked in the horse-pond, and so cried quits with him."

At that Isabel, pitiless as only a good woman could be, cried out upon such lenience.

Again Rafe shifted the tankard. "Well, well," he cut her short, "Lambert will retake him, no question of that, and then, in the temper that Lambert now is in, I think that you yourself will say that Hetherington is not handled over-tenderly."

In Rafe's voice was an undernote of something that was not strong enough to be called pity for the hunted Hetherington, or contempt for Wogan and his fellow-huntsmen, or scorn of his own self that kept silent, stifling an honest doubt, yet shared the nature of all three. Jock caught that note and felt his courage revive, and Isabel caught it too, and so he marked with joy, reading therein a confirmation of his own belief.

"Then," said Isabel, and most dovelike to look upon, showed that like a dove she could upon occasion peck, "if you be so stirred with compassion for that wretched scoundrel, 'tis pity you cannot yourself retake him. No doubt you would —" She paused, in search of a withering sarcasm, and

being a woman of barren imagination, was inspired by the table before her. "No doubt, Rafe, you would bid that ruffian to supper," she concluded scornfully.

"I would," said Rafe, and rose, half smiling, and stood gazing down at his indignant wife. "Hetherington looked hungry t'other night at Graystones, and by now I'll wager he looks hungrier still."

"At times you do mad me," said Isabel, helplessly, and Rafe kissed her, all unwilling though she was, and handed her to the door and out upon the stairs that led to the hall that was now deserted.

When she had gone, Rafe closed the door behind her and sauntered back to the table. He did not sit, and though he took up his tankard he put it down again untasted. For a long minute he stood smoking slowly, with his eyes on the candles before him and his brows knit, and Jock, watching breathlessly, felt that he would have given much, could he have read his thoughts. At last Rafe snuffed out the candles with his fingers, one and then another, till but a single light twinkled on the table, and then, by no conscious volition, only with a sense that at some time this that he had planned must be put to the proof, Jock dashed aside the arras.

At the slight stir of the hangings Rafe looked up, tense and wary, and across the dim parlor the two men eyed each other for an instant, while Rafe puffed a thought more quickly at his pipe, and Jock licked his dry lips with his tongue.

"Mr. Heyroun!" Jock began, and then, with desperate insolence, walked out into the room and set himself astride a chair. Over his folded arms that rested on the chair-back he looked at the silent man before him, and he was minded to try pleas and threats and arguments and a hundred other devices, but what he ended by saying, bluntly and blunderingly, was: "You see! Even as you bade me, sir, I am come hither to supper."

CHAPTER XIII

HIMSELF AGAIN

WHILE Jock wrought havoc among the stewed mutton and parsnips, Rafe Heyroun sat opposite him at the table, with his face half shadowed in the dim light of the one candle, and courteous and half amused, asked questions touching Jock's escape from the burning cottage. With a complete realization that his fate hung on the issue of this hour, Jock answered in kind, and once, at least, contrived to make Rafe smile. To keep Rafe amused and, in a careless way, half sorry for him, to convince Rafe that he was no mere stray trooper, to be left without compunction to Wogan's tender mercies, but a man, as individual and as sensitive as was Rafe himself, that, Jock reasoned, was for the present his best hope.

Not till he had made his supper, and felt that, thanks to the comfort of food and drink and a half hour of civil treatment, he was restored in courage, did he set himself to the serious business that was before him. He leaned forward, then, with his folded arms upon the table. "You'll understand, sir," he broke the moment's silence that had fallen, "I did not come to seek you solely to get my supper, though I thank you for it. I came hither to ask you a question that already you must have asked of yourself."

Rafe lifted his brows, and his face became inscrutable.

With a sinking of the heart, Jock saw that the real man who had smiled at his escapes had taken alarm in his remnant of Puritan conscience and was drawing away to a

suspicious distance. None the less, he went forward stubbornly: "Mr. Heyroun, I pray you question yourself: why did your cousin Philip, the chestnut-haired one, lie as to my identity? Why was he fain to set an ignorant substitute in the place of the right Captain Hetherington, who might have borne tales? Why —"

"My good — Captain," said Rafe, deliberately, "I have received no proof that my kinsman lied."

So speaking, Rafe made as if to push back his stool and rise, but Jock, on desperate impulse, reached across the narrow table and caught his arm. "Give me but time and opportunity to prove that I am I," he begged, "and, sir, as I live, before you are done, you shall have sport and to spare with your cousin Philip."

Beneath his grasp Jock felt Rafe's arm relax, and in Rafe's eyes he caught a flash of the original devil, half mere mischief, half settled hate, that boded little good to the chestnut-haired Philip. "Well," said Rafe, but his voice was guarded, "and how will you go about to prove that you are the man you claim to be?"

"There are those in Yorkshire — " Jock began.

Rafe shrugged his shoulders with a smile that to Jock seemed the very headsman to his hope. "A safe choice!" said he. "Yorkshire is many leagues hence."

Jock drew back, where he had leaned half across the table, and for a moment sat silent. He had cast down his eyes, but he felt the candlelight full upon his face and knew, for his torment, that Rafe, at his leisure, was scrutinizing and appraising him. Hopelessly he was seeking for some new road by which to break through the rampart of his opponent's studied unbelief, when just outside the door he caught the sound of a high-pitched child's voice: "Daddy! Are you within?"

At the words Rafe turned in his place, but before he could

speaking, the door to the hall, which stood unlatched, was pushed half open, and through the crack a little boy sidled into the room. Plainly he had just come prowling from his bed. His feet and legs were bare; he wore his little shirt outside his breeches; and his brown hair fell in a disordered tangle about his keen face and his dark eyes that were like Rafe Heyroun's.

One glance Jock took from the man to the boy that was the man in little, the boy that was Rafe's only son, the boy that his merry cousin had half drowned in the horse-trough at Graystones; then he staked everything on one desperate hazard. "Mr. Heyroun," he said crisply, "I have a witness to my identity nearer than Yorkshire, and he stands yonder. Lad!" He turned to the bewildered child. "Will you come hither to me?"

If the child should cry out, or even shrink and draw back, Jock realized that his last hope would be taken from him, but he found that, acting on mere instinct, he had acted wisely. Little Philip Heyroun was his father's son in more than looks. Warily, like his father, but with good courage, he eyed the stranger that had addressed him, and then he looked to his father, but Rafe made no sign, save that he leaned forward in his seat with eyes intent on what was passing. Of his own will, then, the boy pattered across the room, and with a grave little bow gave his hand to Jock.

"How do you fare, sir?" he asked with childish courtesy, and he made no sign of shrinking when Jock slipped an arm about him and drew him to stand between his knees.

"So you live here at Draycote, eh, my man?" Jock asked in a voice that he tried hard to keep indifferent.

"Ay," said the boy, "with daddy and mammy and my sister Nell, but she is a girl and cannot climb."

"Perchance," Jock hesitated, "you go sometimes to visit your kin at Graystones?"

Again the child assented. "Ay, sir. I went thither in

June, and Captain Hetherington did souse me in the horse-trough, but I did not cry, and when I am a man, I will buy me a sword and kill him. Are you a soldier like mine Uncle Lambert?" he questioned suddenly, with a glance at Jock's great boots. "And where is your sword, then?"

"You spoke of Captain Hetherington," Jock brought him back to the subject in hand. "Would you know the Captain an you saw his face?"

The child nodded, with a knitting of the brows that made him very like his father, and thus encouraged, Jock hazarded the crucial question, "You do not hold, then, that I am Captain Hetherington?"

Puzzled, the boy looked across the table at his father, who kept silent, and then he looked up at Jock, and slowly parted his lips in a smile. "Thou art jesting," he said shyly.

For that word Jock could have hugged him, but loath to startle the child, he held himself in check. "How know you that I am not the Captain?" he asked after a moment. "Tell us that, boy."

There, however, the boy was at a loss and stood frowning and fumbling at the top of Jock's boot with one small hand. "He was he, and you are you," he said at last. "You do not speak with his voice, and — and —" With sudden inspiration he laid his hand on Jock's left arm that rested laxly across his knee. From elbow to wrist the shirt sleeve was rent away, and the arm was bare. "Sure," said the boy, with the pride of a discoverer, "Captain Hetherington had a scar within his arm and I saw it. When he doused me into the horse-trough, his shirt sleeve was upturned and I saw the scar. And you have no scar. But you are a soldier, none the less? And were you in battles?"

The question fell upon deaf ears, for Rafe was out of his seat at last and stood over Jock, candle in hand, and Jock, without waste of words, had thrust back his right shirt sleeve

and held both unscarred arms to the light. For a moment, then, the two men scanned each other in silence, across the tousled head of the wide-eyed child.

"Still," said Rafe, replying to what had not been spoken, "the boy is scarce seven years old, too young for credence in a court of law."

"This is no court of law," retorted Jock, in a voice that struck a note of masterfulness.

At last he realized that the balance was inclining to his side, and in that realization felt his confidence wax strong. He came to his feet, and leaning with both hands on the table, poured out his plea in what was for him a veritable torrent of words. To the Rafe Heyroun that, after his careless fashion, would liefer be kind to all men than to play the bully, he pleaded for mere justice, for the mercy of protection from Wogan's threatened vengeance that he, who was not Captain Hetherington, had in no wise merited; to the Rafe Heyroun that was weary of Draycote and longed for diversion, he set forth the zest of the game of hunting down the chestnut-haired Philip in the coils of his lie. Strengthening this, his strongest line of pleading, he freely gave away his hoarded information — how the right Captain Hetherington was dead at Colchester, how the chestnut-haired Philip had besought him, standing in the Captain's place, to be silent — and as he spoke, he held Rafe's eyes, and glimpsing the soul beyond, knew that he had shaken the man from the unbelief where he had chosen to ground himself.

Yet Rafe, the wary and experienced, was non-committal. He heard Jock to the end without comment, and still without comment turned then to the deeply interested child, with a commonplace question as to what had brought him out of bed. The child, it seemed, had been wishful to have a drink of water from the kitchen, so Rafe, with a meaning word to Jock to stay till his return, led him from the parlor.

Left alone, Jock leaned against the table and eyed the door through which Rafe had gone, and wondered what Rafe would say on his return, and wondered what he had himself accomplished, and finally ceased wondering, and did no more than stare at the long streaks of light upon the dusky floor. At last he heard Rafe's step on the stair, and Rafe came into the room, alone, with a heavy cloak on his arm.

"For to-night you can lie here undisturbed," said Rafe, "and in the morning — well, when morning comes, we'll find what is next to do. Meantime, I have your promise that you will attempt no more escapes?"

Jock bowed, with the touch of dignity that was his at his oldest and best. "In all things, sir, I am now at your disposal," he said, and, moved by something in the tone, Rafe turned on the threshold, candle in hand, and said with a smile, "Give you good night — Hetherington!" For the first time he omitted the hated title of Captain, and that omission Jock hugged to his heart by way of comfort.

After Rafe was gone and the room was in darkness, Jock wrapped himself in the cloak and lay down on the floor. Weary to the bone and spent with two full nights of wakefulness, he speedily was fast asleep, and he knew no more till, roused by a touch upon the forehead, he opened his eyes to find the parlor gray with the first dawn and Rafe Heyroun standing over him.

Half blinded with sleep, Jock rose and followed Rafe down the short flight of stairs, across the empty hall, where the hearth was gray with the ashes of the banked fire, and so by a narrow staircase to a lobby above and a little chamber that nestled beneath the eaves. This was little Philip's sleeping place, Rafe gave him to understand, but little Philip was already up and out. Jock could rest here undisturbed and unmarked till his presence was required 'belowstairs, and meantime here was fresh water and a razor, and clothes

and a pair of shoes that Lieutenant Philip, most ill advisedly, it would appear, had stored at his brother's house.

As soon as he was alone, Jock set to work, and, to the tune of the awaking life in the stable-court below his window, made himself clean and presentable as he had not been in some days. Midway of the task he heard a dubious little rap at his door, and opening, let in the last and least of the Philip Heyrouns. Ostensibly the child had come to get some strands of horsehair from the chest below the window where he kept his treasures, but in reality, as was soon apparent, he was eager to make the acquaintance of the pleasing stranger. He sat down on the bed, and while Jock shaved and settled himself in the doublet that had been Lieutenant Philip's and found, to his joy, that the borrowed shoes were a tolerable fit, entertained him with sundry tales of his martial uncles, and ended with an artless request for a story about a battle. This request Jock could not grant, for he was no teller of tales, but, by way of compromise, he showed little Phil how to braid a fish-line from the horsehairs, and over this task they were speedily good friends.

They were sitting side by side on the chest, with the child's head resting against Jock's arm, as he watched the line grow longer, when of a sudden Jock became aware of a new note in the clamor of the stable-court. To the lowing of cattle, the whinnying of horses, the voices of men, were added the cry of dogs, each moment louder, and the hammering of hoofs on the hard-trodden lane. With sudden inspiration, Jock slapped his thigh. "The leamers from Graystones, for a thousand pound!" he said.

Little Phil, much interested, scrambled up on the chest, and peering from the window, made a prompt report. "'Tis hounds — little hounds — a heap of 'em, baying and whinnying. And horses. And more troopers. And Sim, the huntsman, from Graystones. And mine Uncle Philip." In the

midst of the clamor of the dogs that now rose deafeningly from the stable-court, he snuggled down in his old place beside Jock. "Finish my line, I pray thee," he begged. "I'm fain to show it to my Uncle Phil."

So Jock, listening to the cry of the hounds that had tracked him, went on steadily twisting the fish-line. He did not find it easy to do at that moment, but he would have essayed a much harder task for the sake of keeping the little lad there at his side. He twisted the line, and he even contrived to halt out a tolerable story, not of a battle, to be sure, but of a great trout that he had caught long ago, as a young lad, in one of the brown becks that flowed through Daske Forest, and all the while, as he talked, he listened alertly for the first sound of steps outside his door. He heard them at last, and how he ended his tale he never could have told, but at least he still had the child nestled there against his side in perfect friendliness, when the child's Uncle Philip, for the child's sake Jock's sworn enemy, burst into the room.

At Lieutenant Phil's heels was Wogan, white-faced and grim, and Rafe Heyroun, as inscrutable as an image, but Jock's sole concern was with the Lieutenant. In his heart he knew that already he had won Rafe to espouse his cause, and with equal certainty he knew that he could never win Captain Wogan, who loved Blanche Mallory, to believe that he had spoken the truth and that she, by implication, was false and worse, but of this blundering and headlong Lieutenant Phil he had his hopes. To be sure, the Lieutenant was not won over by the mere sight of the child at Jock's side. He had to bluster and expostulate for a time, while Rafe, in half amusement, and Wogan, in grim disapproval, added no more than a word or two. He had to cross-question the child, reducing him at last almost to tears, but throughout Jock sensed that more and more the Lieutenant was yielding to a doubt as to his identity.

Then, from an unlooked-for quarter, came assistance, for Isabel Heyroun suddenly appeared in the room, militant and bristling, and caught her young son to her. "Now, by my truly!" said she, "you are well put to work, the ging of you, to vex the poor lamb till he is ready to weep! Why will you be questioning, Phil Heyroun, whether yonder man be Captain Hetherington or no? Have you no eyes to see? Why, this is not that black swaggerer, the Captain. This is no more than a lad."

Across the narrow chamber Jock caught Rafe's amused eyes, and very nearly spoilt all by smiling at the jest that in silence they shared between them. He wondered if the gentlewoman had been so sure of his youth and innocence, had she looked on him a little earlier, before the shave and the fresh clothes that he owed to Rafe's long-headed foresight, had changed him from the semblance of battered eight and twenty to weary and rather boyish twenty-one. Next moment he saw another reason for Mistress Heyroun's unexpected partisanship, for Wogan at last took a hand in the family imbroglio.

"'Tis all pestilence folly!" said Wogan. "The child is too young to know whereof he testifies, and did not Mistress Mallory herself swear that this fellow is Captain Hetherington?"

"My child is as good a witness as Blanche Mallory any day!" cried the sister of the man whom Mistress Mallory designed to marry, and went on to cast aspersions on crafty hussies in general, naming no names, and having no need to.

At that Wogan cried, "Bel Wogan!" in a voice that suggested that, had she been indeed Bel Wogan and not Bel Heyroun, he would have shaken his sister, then and there.

Then, of a sudden, the Lieutenant, convinced against his will, came charging in to aid his sister-in-law. "Sure, Lambert," said the Lieutenant, "if you be so confident that

Mistress Mallory spoke the truth, you can have no reason to grudge at our doing all that we can to sift this fellow's story. When he's proved in the end to be a liar — as no doubt he will be! — why, then he's still a prisoner in your hands to deal with as best likes you."

"Ay," sniffed Isabel, ignoring her brother-in-law's ponderous diplomacy, "if you were a kind brother, Lambert, you would rejoice to establish this man's identity and thereby help us to recover the deal box, when you know not but that our Uncle Philip may have left an inheritance to mine own little Phil, and you have ever professed to love the child, and —"

For the first time, to outward seeming, Rafe took a hand in the game. "Go to, Bel!" said he. "Uncle Philip, be sure, never left a groat to child of mine. Never look that way, lass!" Then he glanced at the cloudy faces of his kinsfolk, and half smiling, suggested that they had best discuss the matter further after breakfast. "'Tis ill arguing on an empty stomach," he concluded, and somehow contrived to send all from the room. Last of the train, he turned upon the threshold, and once more Jock had a comfortable sense of sharing a jest with him. "Stay here until I send for you," Rafe bade; "'twill not be long!" and so went his way.

For a full hour Jock lay upon little Philip's bed in the deserted chamber, and over and over again numbered the allies that he had won. Chief of all, he felt that Rafe would insist on his identification, partly for mere justice, partly for the joy of battling with the chestnut-haired Philip, and Lieutenant Phil, a reputed beneficiary under the lost wills and so set to snatch at any least hope held out of their recovery, would side with Rafe for his own fortune's sake, and Isabel Heyroun, most unexpectedly, would make a third, partly because of her hopes for her son, should the lost wills be found, and partly, Jock concluded, because she would take

any side in reason or in unreason that was opposite to the side on which Blanche Mallory fought. These three he could count on, and he felt that he had cruelly misjudged them if they did not prove more than a match for Lambert Wogan.

So the minutes ran on and the hour had lengthened to two hours, when Jock heard a sound so welcome that he judged it to be the shaping of his hopeful fancy. Almost he thought it to be the sound of horses led forth, of saddles flung into place, of all the pleasant bustle of a squadron's making ready to mount and ride, and dreading to dissipate the vision, he hesitated to rise and look forth into the stable-court. But when at length he heard the unmistakable voice of Captain Wogan, giving a command to mount, he sprang to his feet and gained the window in two strides. Then he found that he had not dreamed this happy consummation. In sober truth, he looked down upon Wogan and Lieutenant Phil and their men, all mounted, and presently, a sight that was more gladsome still, he saw their buff-coated backs and the tails of their horses, as they defiled into the narrow lane.

A moment later little Phil came once more to the chamber. Daddy was fain to speak with Mr. Hetherington, he said, swelling with pride that he should do the errand, and Jock, at the word, went belowstairs at a pace that troubled the child to keep up with him. In the hall, where the sunlight came dimly through the leaded panes of the eastern window, Jock saw Mistress Heyroun, who glanced up from a housewifely task and bestowed a smile upon him, because he was anathema to Blanche Mallory, and then, at the entrance of a passage that tunnelled forth, beneath low rafters, to a flagged yard without, he came face to face with dark Rafe Heyroun. He saw that Rafe wore the look of a man who has won a hard-fought battle.

"So they are gone?" Jock spoke his thought outright.

"Ay, gone!" said Rafe, in entire harmony with Jock's

mood of rejoicing, and then tried to assume a formal tone, and did it so ill that in his own despite he smiled. "We are in some doubt, sir, as to your true identity, so I have sent for Inchcome to advise with me. Until he decides what is best to do, Captain Wogan — whose lawful prisoner you are — has been pleased to commit you to my custody."

For a moment Jock stood speechless, while from his mind there slowly faded the vision of the whipping-post at Bury St. Edmund's, of the lonely roof room at Graystones, of the deadly hatred on Captain Wogan's face, what time he felt the Captain's hands close upon his throat. He saw the low-roofed homely farmhouse hall in which he stood, so dim the instant before, flooded, as it were, with a sudden shower of light. Unsuspicious, for once, and grateful to the point where words were hard to find, he held out his hand to Rafe. "From my heart, sir, I thank you," he said.

"If you thanked my son Philip," Rafe answered, "you would go nearer to putting thanks where they are due, sir. By the way," he added, with his hand on Jock's shoulder, "what is it that you call yourself?"

Jock met his eyes, with the rare smile that he had for his friends. "I was christened John Hetherington," he said, "but you can call me what you will, so that you do not call me Captain Hetherington."

CHAPTER XIV

THE LATTER END OF JOY

IN the natural order of events Esdras Inchcome should have jogged up the lane to Draycote farm next day or, at longest, the day after; but the two days passed, while Jock, thankful for the respite, cemented his friendship with little Philip and won the favor of Mistress Heyroun, and Rafe, thankful for the diversion, studied Jock and found him satisfying, and still there was no sign of the little old lawyer. On the third day, however, came a servant from Graystones with a letter from Martin Heyroun, and when Rafe had scanned it, he strolled forth in quest of Jock.

Rafe found Jock in the orchard, closely attended by Phil and his small, chubby sister Eleanor, for whose joint delectation he was trimming a fish-rod. In that task he employed a tolerable clasp knife, which, at Rafe's approach, he bestowed in his pocket with a serene air of possession. "Well," said Rafe, "here's news out of Graystones!" and "Well?" Jock answered, in much the same indifferent tone, though at the word "Graystones" his face had darkened.

Briefly, Rafe explained what had happened: how Inchcome had been summoned into Cambridgeshire by an old friend and client, how the old friend's son — "As shuttle-headed as yourself, it seems," Rafe commented, for Jock's benefit — had been out in arms for the king and taken prisoner, how Inchcome was needed to arrange for the ransoming of the unlucky gentleman, how the said business might consume some days'

time, and meanwhile: "Until Inchcome has leisure to advise upon your case," Rafe concluded, "you must be content still to remain at Draycote."

"I am well content," said Jock, and with a face of relief lugged forth his knife and made a second onslaught on the half-peeled rod.

"A pretty knife!" commented Rafe, with a pleased consciousness, wherein Jock silently shared, of the indignation with which Wogan would have seen his lawful prisoner handling such a tool.

"Ay," said Jock, "I had it of your ploughman in way of trade."

This calm assertion from a gentleman whose sole asset was his skin, filled Rafe with joy. He was eager to learn more of the trade, and presently Jock admitted, with modest diffidence, "He gave me the knife, and when leisure serves I will make him with it, in exchange, a twelve-piece fish-rod, such as we make in Yorkshire whence I come."

Said Rafe, "After this account of your trading, 'tis a waste of words to tell me what county you come of."

Thereafter Rafe called Jock "Yorkshire," a name that Jock half resented at first as in duty bound, and then answered to readily, half pleased, in secret, that Rafe chose to be familiar, as a man might be only with his friends. Not only did Jock have a reasonable sense of the benefits that he could draw from Rafe's tolerance, but also, with a far worthier feeling, he had come honestly to like Rafe himself.

This liking Rafe was pleased to return, for he lived to be diverted and he had found Jock diverting from the moment when he had come forward to demand his supper. So Rafe was kind and companionable, as Jock had not had the slightest expectation that he would be, and Jock himself, unconsciously responding with his best to courtesy and fair treatment, showed less and less of the frank-spoken little

ruffian of his dead kinsman's description, and more and more of the taciturn, brave lad, not yet quite man, that had won Verney Claybourne's regard. In brief, Rafe and Jock discovered, in the face of their opposing politics, that they had common ground whereon to build a friendship, and thus it came about that, in the quiet backwater of Draycote into which the tide of war had whirled him, Jock found his days running as smoothly as ever they had run in his buffeted existence.

It was the fifth or sixth day since Jock's coming to Draycote, when one noontime he heard a smart clatter of hoofs in the stable-court, and like a true-born member of the household, sauntered thither, somewhat behind the rest, to see what was toward. From the spot where he halted, hard by the kitchen doorway, he could see in the stable-court a big troop horse, with the stableboys bustling about him, and Lieutenant Phil Heyroun, loud in talk with his brother; and a little apart, seated on the edge of the horse-trough, he caught a glimpse of a girl whose face was shadowed by her hood, but whose slender young figure set his memory stirring.

While Jock hesitated, little Phil found words. "'Tis my cousin Althea!" he cried, and straightway slipped into the press of the stable-court. When he slipped out again he was towing Althea Lovewell by the hand.

Now at that moment Rafe and all the men at Draycote were preoccupied with the horse, which had gone lame and needed kind and noisy attention, and all the wenches, leaning on the paling of the stable-court, were preoccupied with the men, and Mistress Heyroun, who was preoccupied in the kitchen with the making of custards, had not deigned to look forth, and so it came to pass that for a little space, in the midst of a crowd of folk, Jock and Althea stood alone and unmarked. Their eyes met, and for an instant, while little Phil explained to each who the other was, they kept up a

prudent, formal pretence of never having exchanged so much as two words, and then the girl's eyes came alive and danced, and Jock bit his lip, himself more than half minded to laugh.

"So you are come unto Draycote, mistress?" said he, formally, for the benefit of the little pitcher, called Philip, that stood at his elbow.

"Ay, sir," she answered with a solemn little courtesy. "And you came hither, too. I see, then, you took good counsel and believed at the last that my cousin Rafe was a generous and kindly gentleman, even as — some one told you."

"Some one was kind," Jock replied earnestly, "and I stand deeply in her debt."

"Whose debt?" said Little Pitcher, and Althea laughed and bent to kiss him.

"Now bring me to thy mother, Phil," she said, "for I must speak with her," and as she said the words, either it was Jock's fancy, or the mischief died from her eyes and her face grew tired and troubled, as he sensed that it must have looked on that day when from afar he had watched her brooding in the garden.

Althea went her way into the house, and presently, shrugging off her affairs as after all no proper concern of his, Jock strolled into the stable-court and added his share to the confused counsels that prevailed round the injured horse. Oddly enough, he found his suggestions, touching a poultice, acceptable, — oddly, for he had not looked to find such wisdom in Lieutenant Heyroun. They tended the horse together in temporary amity, and Lieutenant Phil informed him that the good beast was lamed all along of the whim-whams of that foolish wench, his cousin Althea, who had insisted on joining herself unbidden to his company and on posting to Draycote that very day.

"For stark folly commend me to a woman!" Lieutenant Phil continued the subject later, when he and Jock had

withdrawn to comfort themselves for their labors with beer in the buttery. "Why is not one day as good as another to go a-visiting? What if my cousin Jarvis is bent on wooing the silly chit? What else were wenches made for, if not to be wooed? Tell me that!"

The Lieutenant's voice had risen loud in eloquence, when at that point his sister-in-law appeared in the doorway. "I can tell you that you know very little about the matter, Philip Heyroun," she said succinctly, "and you may both pack out of my buttery, and you need have no fear that you will be burdened to convey Althea back to Graystones to-night, Phil, for she is to stay here at Draycote as long as it likes her."

Lieutenant Phil said, with a touch of sarcasm, that he was rejoiced at this news. Jock said nothing, but from his heart he did indeed rejoice. Partly he was glad for the girl, who, as he read her story between the lines, had in desperation sought and found a refuge from Jarvis Heyroun and his hateful familiarity; partly he was glad for himself that he was to have at hand one whom he knew to be a friend to him and whom he guessed to be a pleasant comrade.

That guess, at least, he was able soon to verify by experience. Even had he and Althea been strangers, as they assiduously feigned to be, they could not have so remained for long, while the two children, close friends to both of them, made a living link to draw them together. In the children's company they went to look at this and that of the farm-beasts, or to seek rose-hips in the lane, or nuts in the hazel copses, and on such rambles, in sentences that they found the more diverting to frame since they must wrap their meaning carefully from little Phil's sharp ears, they talked of Graystones and, blessed with the same store of enemies beneath that roof, grew close in sympathy.

The next step in acquaintance they made when they ceased

to confer seriously and fell to jesting together, and that step they took speedily. Althea was born for clean mirth, and Jock was boy enough to recover the boy's trick of light laughter that, thanks to Colchester and Graystones, he had gone near to forgetting. Neither of them was overwitty in speech, but in those heady days of autumn weather they easily found merriment in slight, foolish things. More than once Jock teased Althea, reminding her that she was his kinswoman since they both came of the Lancashire Holcrofts, and invariably Althea let herself be teased, vowing, with a semblance of anger that delighted him, that she was in no wise kin to any of the name of Hetherington.

Exactly what Jock thought of himself in those days were hard to say, for consciously he did not think at all. In this lull of the storm he was content merely to take what benefits kind fate was pleased to send him, to eat and sleep, and jest with a girl whose eyes answered his, and look no farther.

With the girl it was otherwise. In her short life all men had looked upon her with indifference, all save her cousin Jarvis, and remembering how Jarvis had borne himself, she had given humble thanks that the rest of men had passed her by. But now when she looked upon Jock, her good comrade, she knew that there might be yet a third kind of man, unlike the others, a thousand times unlike Parson Jarvis, and in the womanhood that was dawning for her, she felt her heart move toward him.

Unguarded and uncounselled, she realized none the less the danger toward which she stumbled, yet she went forward. She reasoned that it were only a few days, only a few hours, perchance, that they yet would be together, and then he would go for all time. Meanwhile, surely so long as she could laugh with a whole heart she was safe, so with him she laughed, though in her bed at night she cried, and when she found that she thrilled for joy to hear him name her kinswoman,

she scolded him and thought that thus she had made all secure.

To be sure, they should have known better, and so they both did! but presently Jock and Althea formed a habit of taking their rambles without the attendance of Phil and little Eleanor, or, even better, of losing those innocents upon the way. Still, as Jock was ready to maintain with his dying breath, the unlucky inspiration of the game of hunt and hide came, not from them, but from little Philip. Of an evening after supper, while the light still lingered in the fields, the boy proposed his favorite game, and nothing would serve but that Jock and Cousin Althea should join in the sport. So Althea ran away obediently — and a pretty sight it was to see her run, so light and sure of foot was she! She hid herself in the orchard, and speedily Jock sought the same hiding-place and was roundly chidden for coming.

“There were briars in the spot where I had chosen to lie,” he explained unabashed. “Come! Since you are not content that I share your hiding-place, let us go seek a new one that shall be ours in common.”

At the northern end of the orchard was a low gate, and through it they passed out into the fields where the barley lay in sheaves, ready for the wains upon the morrow. In the shelter of a pile of sheaves they sat down side by side, and conscientiously waited for little Phil to come find them. While they waited, a great moon rose slowly above the dim roofs and the church tower and the low line of trees that marked the east, and all the rolling fields and meadows at their feet were bathed in the strong white light, and the shadows of the sheaves and the hedgerows, and here and there of a single tree were sharply black. The sky was all a-shimmer with light, wherein a few stars wavered, and the air was still and sweet with the smell of autumn flowers and of ripened grain.

Somehow, in very short space, Jock and Althea had for-

gotten little Philip and the game that they played. For long minutes they sat silent or spoke few words and foolish. Once he told her that this was like a night long ago, when he had stolen forth, a mere baby, into the harvest fields beyond the parsonage at Begdon, and had lost himself and cried with fright till his mother had come to seek him. "She did not chide me," he said. "She was a most tender and gracious gentlewoman. It is through her blood that you and I are kin," he added quietly, "and you are like unto her."

For once, in the moonlight and the soft air, Althea forgot that it was her part to deny the kinship. She let her hand rest beneath the hand that Jock had laid upon it, and she spoke in a very gentle voice when at last she answered him. "Is it any comfort that you still hold to that fancy of our being kin?"

"'Tis not many times," said he, "that I have offered myself as a kinsman to any one, so 'tis vengeance hard to find myself rejected."

He spoke lightly, yet behind the words she sensed a bitter truth and in sudden compassion she bent nearer him. "I would not say it that first night," she confessed in a low voice, "but it may be that we are indeed akin. My grandmother had a dear cousin who called her daughter Charlotte, after her. And this Charlotte Holcroft married a clergyman in Daske Forest, but I have long since forgot his name."

"It would be Hetherington, and the man was my father," Jock answered. "That makes us cousins thrice removed. And you are not sorry for the kinship?"

She shook her head with the elvishness of her quick smile somewhat softened in the moonlight, and he bent suddenly and kissed her hand that had lain beneath his.

"Oh!" said Althea, quick and soft, and then ere he could justify himself, her eyes grew big and startled and she said, "Oh!" again, but in a different tone. "Do you hear a step

amid the stubble?" she whispered. "'Tis Phil, come to find us."

Rising on one knee, Jock listened. "I hope it is Phil, and no other," he said beneath his breath, and almost as he said the words, found that the wish was wasted. Round the pile of sheaves came the one whose step they had heard, and it was not little Philip but Rafe Heyroun himself.

Rafe halted and stood looking down at Jock and Althea, and with chill discomfort Jock realized that the man who had been his friend had withdrawn many leagues distant, and in his place stood a sombre gentleman with a shred of Puritan conscience, with whom he had small acquaintance. Desperately Jock caught at the first plausible explanation that came to his mind. "Sir," said he, "I have just learned by a happy chance that Mistress Lovewell is a near kinswoman of mine."

"Yes, Cousin Rafe," Althea pleaded, "'tis so indeed!"

Rafe looked unconvinced. "The dew is heavy and you were best be under cover," he told Althea, and on such pretext led the way back to the house. At the kitchen door he let the girl pass in, but he stayed Jock, laying a hand upon his arm. "Wait!" said he. "So you are kinsman to Mistress Lovewell. And what degree of kin are you to Captain Hetherington?"

Jock reddened as he caught the implication. "I am a cousin in the first degree," he gave a curt answer to the more obvious meaning of the question, and so departed to his chamber.

For a long space he stood gazing out on the moonlit fields and the glowing sky that, so short a time before, he had watched from the shelter of the sheaves, while unwillingly he realized that he had been dwelling in a fools' paradise, and that the fools' paradise now was at an end. He had forgotten, so kindly had they used him at Draycote, that to be a Cavalier meant, to the rank and file of the Puritan party, to be a liber-

tine. He had forgotten, what would be far more to his disadvantage with Rafe, who was no mere fanatic, that he came of the blood of Captain Hetherington, a most unblushing rakehell. Thus it had come to pass that, in his forgetfulness, he had aroused in Rafe the one kind of suspicion that he would find it hardest to allay, and in that pleasant consciousness of irreparable mischief done, he went at last to bed.

Jock rose next morning with the set purpose of winning back somehow the ground that he had lost in Rafe's favor, but he had no chance even to make the attempt, for that same day Esdras Inchcome, returned at last out of Cambridgeshire, drew rein in the court of the Draycote stable. Five minutes later Inchcome, Rafe, and Jock were closeted in the farmhouse parlor, and Inchcome, having looked upon Jock, in the altered, youthful guise that, thanks to his days at Draycote, he now wore, had given over his last vestige of belief in Jock's identity with Captain Hetherington.

"Here's our work to begin afresh!" Inchcome said, and promptly outlined a new plan of action. He was bound next day to London on the business of his Cambridgeshire client, and while there he would seek out and send to Graystones any credible witnesses to his identity that Jock could name.

Long since schooled by Rafe to meet this contingency, Jock named his men — the host of a tavern in Holborn, a horse-trader in Smithfield, the keeper of a gaming house in Cold Harbor, and a lawyer of sorts, one Symon Wastel, in Coleman Street — all Yorkshire men who of old had known him and his cousin, the Captain. In special did he lay stress on the reliability of Symon Wastel, for of old Wastel had had moneys of his father, the Begdon parson, and these Jock had sought three years before to recover. He had not recovered the moneys, but he had beaten Wastel and broken his collar bone.

"So you can take oath on't that Sym Wastel will give his

testimony without favor unto me," Jock ended his explanation.

With close attention Inchcome heard Jock out. "A hopeful witness, this last!" he commented. "O' my word, Rafe, I believe this Wastel in Coleman Street to be the same that once was in your Uncle Philip's service. In that case we may rely upon him, indeed."

Rafe nodded, with his face keen and alive as Jock had seen it on the night when he first had hinted at the sport of running the chestnut-haired Philip to earth. "A chance," said Rafe, "that Captain Hetherington's cronies may have been also friends to my swashing cousin Philip. I'd fain speak with the ruffling gentleman dwells in Cold Harbor. Now, by my credit, Inchcome, I'll ride with you myself to London!"

In that word, as Jock knew, there rang a death knell to one hope of his. When Rafe left Draycote, he suspected that he should leave also and that his destination would be Graystones, and in this he read the future aright. Later, toward sunset, Rafe came to him from a long private talk with Inchcome and told him that next day he would be returned to Wogan's custody. This news Jock heard in stoic silence. To be sure, it was what he had looked for. Still he could not help wondering if, had he not been cousin to Captain Hetherington, had it not been for the girl and the moonlight and the barley field, he might not have been suffered stay yet a time longer in the haven of Draycote, safe from Wogan's hands.

Early next morning, before he was to ride with Rafe and Inchcome, Jock sought to have a word alone with Althea, but he sought in vain. Somehow, as on the day preceding, she contrived to be always guarded, now by the two children, now by the ungain serving wench, Bess, now by Mistress Heyroun herself, who for the first time looked upon Jock austerely. So remote had Althea become, that he felt bewilderedly that he must have dreamed the hour in the barley field and all that

went before to make that hour possible, but when in the last moment that was left him he went to her deliberately, even before Mistress Heyroun's face, and spoke a word of formal farewell, he suspected that he was again at fault. Either he could not trust his sight, or else he saw, now that he stood near to Althea, that she had been weeping. He marked a heaviness in her lids, a tremulousness about her lips, that could come only from tears.

"God be wi' you!" said he, and tried to catch her eyes, but her eyes that hitherto had been so honestly avoided his. He had to go his way with the wonder still upon him, whether she too had wakened from a fools' paradise and for that waking had wept.

CHAPTER XV

SPRINGES TO CATCH WOODCOCKS

AT Heronswood, the village of crooked-gabled houses strung along a puddly street, where half of Wogan's troopers lay, the little company halted to eat their noon meal, and when they rode on again their number was less by one. With a brave jingle of stirrup irons and of bits, Rafe and Inchcome and the two men that attended them headed gayly for London town, while Jock stood in the miry road before Lieutenant Philip's quarters and watched till they rounded the curve by the churchyard wall and so passed out of his sight.

Then it was that Captain Wogan, who stood at Jock's elbow, deigned at last to speak a word to him. Wogan's head was clear of bandages, but there was an ugly scar on his forehead, and by the look of his face and the tone of his voice Jock decided that he had neither forgotten the buffets at Barbroke, nor forgiven him for having had the insolence to claim an identity other than that which Mistress Mallory had assigned him.

Said Wogan: "I'll take your promise that you will attempt no escape, and to pleasure my brother Heyroun I'll leave you unguarded and grant you such privileges as in like case are accorded to a gentleman."

Jock tried to force himself to say civilly, "I thank you," and said the words like a challenge.

"No need to say it," Wogan cut him short. "I do this but at my brother's entreaty, and I tell you this in fair warning:

If you do break your promise in the least particular, I hold myself clear of all pledges to Rafe, and then I have medicine for you that you'll not relish in the taking."

With this promise, of the sincerity of which he had no doubt, still ringing in his ears, Jock presently rode for the second time in his life beneath the vine-covered gatehouse at Graystones, and dismounted at the door of the grim mansion that was once more to be his prison. Of those that he encountered in the next hour he mentally kept a list, which he reviewed, when at last he was alone in his old quarters in the roof room, and found edifying.

Item, he checked it off, one middle-aged gentlewoman who sniffed. That was Mistress Difficult, spiteful, fanatic, no friend to him, and vaguely troubled at his coming.

Item, one middle-aged gentlewoman with ringlets who sobbed. That was Mistress Henrietta, who by now was declaring that he was not the Captain and, unless he much misread her, would never forgive him for being the innocent cause of her conviction as a liar.

Item, one proper handsome young gentlewoman, named Mallory, who had met his gaze boldly and scornfully, yet at heart, as he suspected, feared him far more than either of the older women.

Item, one whey-faced young Puritan, Jarvis, who had told him outright that he was doomed to the hell of perjurers and false witnesses.

Item, one venerable Puritan sea-captain, Martin Heyroun, who had railed upon him in a voice of thunder for a scurvy impostor, not to have said at the outset that he was not Captain Hetherington.

At least Jock took comfort in the thought that one of his enemies, the chestnut-haired Philip, was absent, as he had contrived to learn, upon a week's pleasuring, and then as he realized that he was seeking for comfort, he mocked at his

depression. Surely, he was no little lad to lose heart because of the hard looks and open sneers that inevitably he was doomed to bear in that hostile household.

For a day or two indeed Jock contrived to make himself comfortable. As naturally as a duck takes to water, he gravitated to the stables, where he struck up a kind of armed truce acquaintance with some of the grooms and the troopers who were quartered at Graystones, and where moreover, thanks to the dead Philip Heyroun, he found a goodly fellowship of horses and of dogs. But soon he ceased to find comfort in the soft nuzzling of a horse's nose or the wet caress of a dog's eager tongue, and in some amazement he realized that, for the first time in his life, he was hungry for human kindness, such as he had known at Draycote.

As unsentimental a youth as ever drew breath, Jock would not admit that his separation from Althea had anything to do with the mood of doubt and of discouragement that now settled upon him. It was only that here at Graystones, when he looked beyond the passing moment, he saw blackness ahead. Even should his identity be established beyond question, he asked himself, what good would come to him thereby? When he was proved to be plain Jock Hetherington, an out-at-elbow gentleman, incapable of paying ransom, what better fate could he look for than a term of forced labor in the sweltering cane fields of Barbadoes?

At Draycote Jock had found it possible to stifle such doubts, repeating to himself that somehow, at the last, Rafe Heyroun would stand his friend. At Graystones, reverting to his old cynicism, he called himself a fool to have trusted Rafe or any man. Yet always in his heart something at which he scoffed kept telling him that he would believe in Rafe and see the future clear once more, could he have a single hour at Draycote, could he speak, even of light and foolish things, with Althea Lovewell, or for one silent minute look into her eyes.

One night he dreamed of standing thus with her, and he felt the doubt and the dread of the future fall from him. It was a foolish dream, in which he caught the glint of scarlet rose-hips at a turn of the lane that he knew, and heard little Phil's voice crying to him to come play at hunt and hide, but through the vague blending of sight and sound he kept the steady vision of Althea's face and the sense of comfort that came with her presence. When he woke and found himself lying in the roof room, with the light of the waning moon that he had watched with her as it waxed great falling chill across his bed, he felt that he could have wept for loneliness and disappointment and the burden of doubt that pressed upon him the more heavily for that moment of release.

So clear had been the dream that the thought of Althea stayed with Jock, even when the day had dawned and he went, a sullen object of suspicion, lounging his listless way about the house. Half unconsciously he shaped his steps toward the walled garden where days before he had seen the girl about her tasks. The leaves of the cherry trees were now touched with a pinkish tinge, and the carnations were withered, and the gilliflowers were past their prime. He sauntered slowly along the gravelled path, and now stood and tried to figure the face of the girl as he remembered it, and now, in anger at his failure to recall the charm of her living presence, strode on more quickly, and as he went switched off the heads of the late marigolds with a bit of stick that he had caught up.

He had been so sure that he had the garden to himself that he started in surprise when he caught the sound of a step on the gravel behind him. Guardedly he faced about, and he felt his surprise redouble as he recognized the man that was approaching. It was the chestnut-haired Philip, returned at last from his pleasuring. Fresh from the sight of Rafe, Jock realized as never before the hideousness of the resem-

blance that was between the kinsmen, for Philip, as he saw him now, was Rafe limned with a weaker pencil and colored in washed-out tints, chestnut and sallow where Rafe was black and brown, buckling at the waist, like a warped plank, where Rafe held himself flawlessly erect.

In the midst of his scrutiny Jock realized that Philip stood blinking at his side and he heard him speak in a low voice, "Please you to step with me a pace into the filbert walk, Mr. Hetherington?"

At the unlooked-for omission of the title of Captain, Jock opened his eyes, and then without reply followed the chestnut-haired Philip into the shelter of the nut trees that screened them from the windows of the house. Something was afoot, he knew, and at the prospect of action he lost all kinship to the lad that a moment before had been brooding over a girl's face.

"'Tis some time now," began Philip, ingratiatingly, "that I have been fain of a moment's private speech with you."

"Once before you were very fain of such speech with me," Jock answered, alert and dangerous. "Sure, you have not forgot the night of my first coming hither, when you promised Captain Hetherington —"

Philip stopped blinking. "Promised *you!*" he amended sharply. "I promised to aid you, Jock Hetherington, if you'd hold your tongue. And you didn't!"

It was a bold lie, but Jock, as it happened, had not been born the day before. He laughed outright, and then, not deigning to argue, fell to whistling softly and with apparent unconcern snapped in fragments the bit of stick that he still held.

Then did Philip acknowledge a check by shifting his ground. "Come, we can waive that question," he said serenely. "For the present, sir, believe only this, that I would help you, and you would suffer me. When all's said, you're kinsman to

Captain Hetherington, he that was of old my friend, and for his sake I would gladly set you on the way to freedom."

Jock looked up, smiling in a way that made Philip blink the faster. "In brief," said he, "you would be rid of me. Be honest, good sir, if it lie within your power."

Philip strove for the echo of a laugh. "Yes," he said, "you've hit it aright. Well, let us say I would be rid of you. You need ask no reasons —"

"I've no need to," Jock answered contemptuously, and turned to walk away. Next moment he learned the unwisdom of his last speech and the eternal unwisdom of underrating an opponent.

Driven to his last extremity, Philip stabbed with his tongue. "You've been snug in the counsels of my sweet cousin Rafe, haven't you?" he sneered. "And you think perhaps that he will play the kind elder brother after he's made his use of you? Tut, tut! You're wide o' the mark in that, my lad! When you've served Rafe's purpose, you are still Lambert Wogan's prisoner, and then do you look to your skin, for you'll find that my cousin Rafe has a vengeance short memory!"

With diabolic inspiration Philip had found the traitor in Jock's camp. Alone he could not have prevailed, but when he joined with Jock's own reason, he bore down not merely Jock's courage but his common sense. Unnerved by the presentation of his own most cruel doubts, Jock stood hesitating and troubled, and while he hesitated, Philip pressed his advantage.

"Come!" said he, in his former masterful tone. "Which will you do? Bide here on the chance of Rafe's kindness, or take the certainty of escape that I can give you? I purpose to bribe the master of one of the fishing craft, here on the coast, to convey you safe into France. What say you to the proffer? Will you go?"

For one flashing moment Jock felt himself dazzled with the blue of great waters that the words conjured up and almost beaten from his footing by the blast of the free wind that seemed to sweep over him. Then to his salvation he had, by old practical habit, turned all his thought to the immediate obstacle in his path to liberty. "Well," he said, and hesitated a moment, for he dreaded to ask the question. "Well! What of the promise that I gave to Captain Wogan, that I would make no effort to escape?"

Philip snapped his fingers. "What of it?" he queried, still in the same high tone by which, he fondly judged, he had gained the ascendancy, but speaking thus, he gave the touch too much that set the whole structure toppling.

Of a sudden Jock saw with clear sight. He looked at Philip who spoke so lightly of a violated faith, and realized that the man who urged him to be a promise-breaker could never be trusted himself to keep a promise. He had thrilled at the prospect of escape, but he saw it now the scheme of the man who had already once betrayed him. "I thank you, no!" he said, and with a feeling that he would liefer see no more of Philip, turned away.

"So 'tis no more than your parole that holds you from freedom?" Philip asked.

"No more than that!" Jock answered in his dryest voice, and walked away, yet not so quickly but that on Philip's face, where he held there should have been only bafflement, he caught the flicker of a thin-lipped smile.

Deep in perplexity, Jock paced down the garden walk till he came to the old stone bench where he had once seen Blanche Mallory sit. There he seated himself, and dug his heels into the mould, while he tried to think out the reason of Philip's surprising offer to further his escape. Clearly, since Philip did not love him, it must be that he feared him, and he feared him, Jock decided, because he was the living witness to that

awkward lie by which the whole fabric of Philip's intrigue might be unravelled.

"'Tis in the very air to what end Rafe Heyroun has gone to London," Jock reasoned out the matter. "So this chestnut-haired callymoocher knows that, unless he wishes to have reputable witnesses tell him to his face that he lied when he called me Captain Hetherington, he must send me whither they cannot come to identify me. Now afore me, 'tis cleverly thought of him!"

Eagerly Jock waited to see if the chestnut-haired Philip would again approach him, but in this expectation he did injustice to Philip's discretion. The day passed, and the day that followed it, and never once by look or gesture did Philip hint that he had spoken so much as a word in private to Jock Hetherington. Tantalized by this careful reserve, angered at the man's skilled policy, Jock found none the less that he could think of nothing but the alluring prospect of escape that had been flashed before his eyes. To his own indignation he realized that he was waiting, hoping for the broaching of a second project to which in honor he might be able to accede.

Yet for all his tense expectancy Jock was amazed at the quarter from which at last the signal came. It was on the second day after his interview with Philip, a Saturday, that as he trudged down the stair from the roof room, on the stroke of the dinner hour, he came face to face with Blanche Mallory. Gravely he stood back to let her pass as he had done at all of their few chance encounters, but to his surprise she paused beside him.

"I have to speak to you," she murmured with downcast eyes. "Will you come this afternoon to the east gallery? 'Tis remote. None will spy upon us. And indeed I have that to say which concerns you nearly."

Blanche raised her eyes then and let them do their full

work, but he would say no more than, "Your servant for this courtesy!" and with no firmer pledge she had to content herself and hurry away.

Of a truth Jock scarcely knew whether or not to keep the appointment. He fully expected Blanche to propose the scheme of escape that Philip had offered, for he mistrusted that she and Philip, leagued in a common lie, were leagued in the purpose to be rid of the one whose presence could most damningly refute that lie. In utter disgust at the two clumsy conspirators, he half resolved to keep clear of them both, and in this prudent resolution spent a part of the afternoon in his own chamber.

Naturally, however, he thought of little save of the interview that he was going to avoid, and on the sudden he had a new idea. After all, was he not rash to have made so sure of what Blanche had to say? What if it were nothing to do with Philip and escape? What if she had some news of Althea Lovewell? The thought was mere madness, as he knew, yet he dallied with it, and in the end, almost without conscious resolve, he left his quarters, and down a stair and along a twisting passage sought the door of the east gallery.

As he laid hand on the latch Jock paused. Within the gallery he could hear the soft purr of a wheel and a sweet voice that wove in and out of the sound a strain of an old song:—

"Sweet England's pride is gone,
Welladay! Welladay!"

He found the tune pretty, but he held it had been prettier, had it begun before his step had sounded in the lobby. With cynical enjoyment he pushed open the door, and standing at gaze on the threshold, took in the scene that had been prepared for his delectation.

The gallery was long and low, wainscotted in dark oak, with latticed windows set with lozenge-shaped panes. Now,

in the mid-afternoon, the shadows were chill at the northern end, but through the southern window came a shaft of clear, strong sunlight, the brighter for the darkness on which it trenched. In this bath of strong light, with the glowing dark wainscot behind her, sat Blanche Mallory. She wore a gown of deep wine color, with a scarf of tiffany disposed about her white shoulders, — an amazing dress, it seemed to Jock, in which to go about the homely task of flax spinning, but most becoming to the girl's clear-skinned and dark-haired comeliness. She sat in an admirable pose on a low form, with her head bent above her task and her white hands fluttering, as she plied her wheel, and all the while she sang.

For a moment Jock studied this picture of industry, and then said he, "Very pretty, in truth!"

At his voice the girl looked up, all confused and startled. "Oh, it is you?" she cried.

"The same!" said he, and closed the door behind him.

"Ah!" she sighed. "You are come in a quarrelsome mood, Mr. Hetherington. I would that you might see the folly of our wrangling. Surely, we aided each other on the night when you quitted Graystones. And we may aid each other again. Come!" She smiled with a sudden friendliness that was beautiful to see. "Sit, and listen to me, sir."

She had pointed to a stool that stood at a little distance, but Jock, ignoring the gesture, strode across the gallery and sat himself beside her on the form. "Speak!" he bade. "I'll listen to what you will."

In the face of his cool assurance Blanche dropped her futile semblance of displeasure. Slowly she smiled in a more malign and less friendly, yet, he felt, more natural fashion. "And will you do what I counsel?" she questioned, leaning a little toward him, and then, with much play of eager eyes and pretty, gesticulating hands, set forth a plan for his escape, Philip's

plan, though the name of Philip was scrupulously left unmentioned.

Jock realized that, disguise the matter as he would, this was what he had expected to hear, what he had come thither to hear, and as he listened, he grew more and more angry with himself for dallying with this project. Something of this anger he suffered creep into his mood toward Blanche herself, who had sought once more to play with him, and curtly enough, when she had ended, he addressed her. "Next time bid Philip Heyroun do his own task, and, mistress, be advised yourself and do not again seek a stranger at his bidding."

Something in the girl flared up at the insinuation. "I have done naught at his bidding," she said. "'Tis of mine own will I would help you for that my word aforetime did you hurt, for that —"

Their eyes met for the first time, and then suddenly, using the artifice of last resort, perhaps, or, it might be, stung to confusion by genuine shame, Blanche hid her face in her hands and wept.

"Oh, you are cruel to me!" she said in a choked voice. "You are cruel — and Philip Heyroun is cruel. Yes, I came to you because he durst not. Because I must. Because it was the price he named by which I bought from him that which I longed to know. In mercy why did you not tell me? It stood so near my heart! Why could you not in mere pity tell me that he was dead?"

"That who was dead?" Jock asked more gently, half ashamed before the girl's tears.

Her head rested now on her knees and her shoulders heaved with her sobbing. "Hetherington — your kinsman. He is dead — the man I — Philip told me."

With grim satisfaction Jock smiled, for he saw that his interpretation of Philip's behavior was the true one. Philip's

pleasure journey had been upon the business of establishing the death of Captain Hetherington, and it was in the sure knowledge that this most damning witness against him was gone that Philip now was acting. So long as the Captain lived, Jock could see clearly how Philip should strain every nerve to set an ignorant substitute in the Captain's place, and now that the Captain was dead and the substitute's identity in question, he could see with equal clearness how Philip should wish to remove that substitute beyond the reach of identification.

Up and down the page Jock read Philip's manœuvres, and he read the same purpose in the artifices of the girl, his tool. Yet, because the girl wept in what, for once, seemed honest distress, he half repented of his bearing toward her and half was moved to pity her. "Come, come!" he urged. "Crying will not amend it. I pray you, mistress! On my soul, I had not made my choice of free will so to hurt you!"

It was an unconscious token of his estimate of Blanche, that as he spoke Jock slipped his arm about her, as if she were but a kind wench of the camps in need of comfort. Next moment, remembering himself, he would have drawn back, but the girl, acquiescent in his instinctive reading of her, relaxed in his hold and sobbed against his shoulder. With a grimace at his simplicity to have been in the least moved by her easy tears, Jock still, being human, held her to him, and promptly Blanche began to press her supposed advantage.

"You pity me! Oh, I knew you must!" she sobbed, and lifted her wet eyes to his face. "You are generous, after all. You are like my own John Hetherington."

At this comparison to his cousin Jock hardened.

Blanche saw her error, and instantly dropped her head again on his shoulder. "I know not what I say!" she

moaned. "But I can trust you, I know that now. You will help me. You will go away, even as I beg —"

At that moment, choked short in her weeping, she held breath and seemed to listen. Warned by her sudden silence, Jock hearkened too, and heard a footstep in the lobby without and the movement of a hand on the latch.

The girl lifted her face, thin and sharp and foxlike on the sudden, and all in the same instant flung herself back from him with a dreadful shriek. "Help! Help me! Oh, Lambert! Lambert!"

Still shrieking, she dropped to the floor at Jock's feet, just as the door was dashed open and Captain Wogan, in the ever grateful guise of righteous avenger, burst into the room.

CHAPTER XVI

THEY THAT TELL NO TALES

THE glow in the west was fading and in the roof room the shadows were thick and black, when at last Jock lifted his head where he lay upon the floor. He was spent with helpless raging, and his head was bruised, and his arm that had been wrenched was aching, but at least, he reflected with satisfaction, he had not been led, a meek and unresisting Joseph, to his prison. He had set his mark on two of Wogan's troopers and, he had fond hope, on Wogan himself in the red moments after they had burst into the gallery.

With the old anger stirring him to the soul, Jock recalled the events that were huddled into those minutes. Men, the whole household, it seemed to him, had poured into the gallery, and Blanche had shrieked and shrieked, and he had fought blindly to guard his own head until by sheer press of numbers he had been borne to the floor. There he had lain, struggling for breath under the hands that half throttled him, while afar off, as in an ugly dream, he had heard Blanche, sobbing and laughing with hysteria, pour forth her shameless story, and heard the women cry out upon him and the men mutter savagely of what should be his punishment.

They had haled him to his feet at last. No one had asked his side of the story. Instead, lessoned by the deductions that even Rafe, his one-time friend, had drawn from the happenings in the barley field at Draycote, he had realized that already he was tried and condemned. Because he was of the

Cavalier party, every soul in Graystones believed that he was, in the nature of things, a debauched ruffian and was soberly rejoiced that he had revealed himself in his true colors.

He had wasted no strength in useless protests. That, at least, he could recall for his comfort. He had looked upon Wogan and upon Blanche, who cowered, sobbing still, in Wogan's arms, and he had chosen his words deliberately, "Mistress, you played that trick too well for any mere novice."

He had thought that perhaps Wogan would kill him for that speech, and he had held that were a better fate than to suffer the manhandling of Wogan's followers, but Wogan had turned his back, and hushing the girl's fresh outcry of hysteria, had signed to his troopers to take Jock away. They had thrust him into the roof room, and there for hours he had lain on the floor just as he had flung himself, and now it was dark and he was outworn and his head ached.

From where he lay he could see the oblong of the narrow window, framing in darkness the bluer darkness of the night, and sharp across the oblong he saw the black line of a single bar that had been screwed into place. They had barred his window. They had locked his door. They had taken away his every chance of escape. There in the roof room he must wait helpless till Wogan chose to deal with him, and Wogan, unquestioned, nay, on such provocation, even applauded, might have him flogged in the stable-court, or even, as had been hinted, have his ears cropped or his nostrils slit, a mutilation that for the victim's whole lifetime would be a badge of shame.

"Passion of me, but I'll balk him in that!" Jock swore, and drew forth the clasp knife that he had won in trade from the Draycote ploughman. Since his coming to Graystones he had kept the knife in his pocket, out of sight and suspicion, and so, as he was believed to be weaponless, he had escaped being searched. "Ere they lay hand on me, 'twill

serve sweetly for my throat or another's," he reflected as he tested the blade.

Knife in hand, he dropped down again with his head on his bent arm, and thus he lay moment after moment, hour after hour, while the blue oblong of the window brightened with scattered stars, and in the rooms below all sounds of life grew fainter and at last ceased. It must have been hard on midnight when he heard the sound for which he had braced himself, the sound of a footstep in the lobby outside his door, and then the cautious creak of a key turned in the lock. He rose to his feet, and setting his back against the wall, waited, with knife drawn, for the coming of Captain Wogan.

He saw the door swing slowly ajar, saw a dark figure slip through, and then, in the darkness, heard a guarded voice whisper: "Hetherington! Are you waking?" and he knew it for the voice, not of Wogan, but of the chestnut-haired Philip.

In the sudden relief Jock started forward, ready almost to fall upon the newcomer's neck, and Philip caught his arm and drew him to the bed. "Sit down!" he bade, in his old tone of mastery. "I am your friend still for all your pestilence folly. And perchance you are minded to try my plan of escape, now that you are released of your parole."

The mockery in Philip's tone reached Jock, even in the mood of headlong thankfulness with which he had sprung to greet a possible deliverer. In sudden enlightenment he turned on the man beside him. "You planned it!" he whispered furiously. "You urged that jade to speak with me. You sent Wogan to take us together —"

For once Philip made no attempt at denial, but instead laughed very softly. "Truth, I did!" said he. "And the Mallory wench and our honest Captain played their parts well, you must confess, for folk that had not been forewarned. And now that your door is locked and Wogan vowing ven-

geance upon you, you'll agree perhaps that you are released of the obligations of your precious parole, and look more kindly on my proffer to aid your escape. What say you to it? Come! I cannot dally here all night."

Jock made no answer. With elbows on knees and his aching head in his hands, he tried to think, for he knew well that never in his life had he had greater need of clear and quick thought. He had always distrusted Philip, and he distrusted him the more when he considered his share in the doings of that afternoon, but still the uncertainty of escape with Philip's help were better than the certainty of shameful punishment or death, which was surely his if he stayed longer at Graystones. With much the same desperate recklessness with which, six weeks before, he had flung himself out of the hands of the guards at St. Andrew's into the power of the Heyrouns, he cast himself upon the kindness of the chestnut-haired Philip.

"Do what you will with me," he said. "I must escape from Graystones and I cannot escape unhelped."

"Well said!" Philip complimented, and clapped him on the shoulder.

At the touch Jock flinched. He particularly disrelished Philip in his genial moments.

Unabashed, Philip unfolded his plan: "Captain Wogan has ridden to Barbroke and he will not return thence until Monday, the day after to-morrow. That gives you one day of respite and so makes to our advantage. I have here a key to your door which I had wrought to this purpose. To-morrow midnight do you let yourself out of this room and escape from the house into the fields. This part I trust to you."

"I have it pat," Jock answered, with rising spirit. "I've done it once afore."

"Go eastward," Philip continued, "and presently you'll reach the highway to Clegden — a village nine miles up the

coast, across the river Illey. Follow the highway till you come to a ford, and there turn down of the left hand. Sixty rods upstream you'll find a hollow beneath the bank where you shall lie close till nightfall. I'll set food there for you. Myself, I shall ride to-morrow to Clegden. 'Tis the village where I dwell, and I give out that I go thither on a family concern, but in truth I go to make ready for your embarkation into France. Toward twilight on Monday I shall return by the Clegden road, and you shall meet me at the ford whereof I spoke. I'll have money for you and a brace of pistols and some last counsels touching your course at Clegden village." He paused. "Can you remember all?"

"Right as a gun!" Jock nodded. Once and twice he said over his instructions till he had them perfect, and conning them jealously, he saw no flaw nor place for a trap. "I'll not fail you, sir," he promised.

"Good lad!" Philip encouraged, and would have clapped him on the shoulder again, if Jock had not warily removed. Thereat Philip chuckled comprehendingly and with such good night stole from the room as quietly as he had come.

Jock, for his part, lay down on the truckle-bed, with the clasp knife and the key to the door in his pocket and questioning thoughts of Philip in his head. At least he was relieved of his fear lest Wogan come next moment to deal with him, but he was so wrought upon by the prospect of escape that he was not able to sleep till the dawn of Sunday was breaking.

That night, in the dark midhours, Jock stole forth for the second time from the house of Graystones, and gained the desolate highway that led to Clegden. Along this highway he trudged beneath the setting stars, till he lost the stars in a tangle of dusky wood, and in the thick of the trees heard a rippling sound of water, by which he judged that he had reached the ford that was his landmark. A moment

later he was wading upstream under the low branches, and as the gray light that runs before the dawn brightened about him he spied his goal, a hollow, almost a little cave, beneath the bank. Thankfully he stepped to land, and when he found in a dry nook the food, a plenteous share of bread and beef, that had been promised him, he felt his estimate of Philip rise.

While Jock made his breakfast he studied the sky, and noted with uneasiness the angry glow of red in the east. A storm was brewing, he read the signs, and before the long hours of the morning were passed, he had uncomfortable proof of his skill in prophecy, for rain began to fall. At first it was no more than a feeble drizzle, but by noon it had become a cold and steady downfall that set him swinging his arms and shifting his feet for warmth. By such means he endured until he found that the water was trickling into his shelter, and at that discovery, though it yet must lack two hours of the time appointed for his meeting with Philip, he quitted the hollow.

Recklessly he went searching the wood for a dryer shelter, and glad to be afoot once more, wandered on until he realized that he was almost on the edge of the highroad. In some haste he started to turn back, when he spied the very hiding-place that he had sought, a little natural shelter formed between a low rock, two young trees, and the fallen limb of a larger tree. Once beneath it, he discovered that he had only to raise his head and he could overlook a little space of road on the hither side of the ford. Safe in the thought that thus he should be able to see Philip the instant that he reached the meeting-place, he settled himself to wait.

It was yet some little time to twilight, the hour that Philip had named, when Jock caught the sound of hoof-beats upon the wet road, and with a sudden sense of his imprudence in venturing so near the highway, crouched low while he waited

for the rider to pass. He heard the slow splashing as the horse crossed the ford, and then a voice that he knew called to the beast to stand still. Cautiously he lifted his head, and to his relief saw that the rider was the chestnut-haired Philip. On first impulse Jock started to rise and go to meet his ally, but on the old suspicious instinct of which he now was half ashamed, he paused for a moment to watch him.

Suspicious though he was, Jock could not find Philip's conduct extraordinary. For half a minute, maybe, Philip sat his steaming horse and glanced about him, then he swung out of the saddle, drew his cloak closer round his shoulders, and thrusting one arm through the bridle, waited yet another little space, and all the while, albeit he marvelled at his own distrust, Jock, in his hiding-place, waited too.

At last Philip turned to the horse's side, and taking a pistol from the holster, looked to the priming. Jock's heart gave a sudden thump, though he told himself that it was no more than natural that a man should look well to his arms. But he kept his eyes glued upon Philip, and presently he saw that, instead of returning the pistol to the holster, he slipped it beneath his cloak.

Suddenly Jock heard reëchoing in his ears his own words to Philip: "In brief, you would be rid of me." Yet in his folly he had not thought of the double meaning of the words, he had not realized that there were surer ways to silence a dangerous witness than to send him into France. He looked at the wet gray shafts of the rain and the dripping wood and, in the deserted roadway, at the solitary figure of the man with the pistol beneath his cloak, and for one moment he felt his heart sink.

Next instant Jock felt the impulse to fight surge up in him, and then on the sudden he scoffed at both his fright and his anger. Truth, he was grown fanciful with two days of solitary thought! Why, he himself in wet weather would

have looked to the priming of his pistol and sheltered it from damp, even as Philip had done. Yet, though he reasoned with himself, he could not banish his suspicion. Moment after moment he lingered in his covert, watching, waiting, he scarcely knew for what. When at length he decided to venture out, he crept cautiously from his hiding-place, and then as he strode toward the highway, made a great stir in the bushes, as if he were approaching for the first time.

With entire steadiness Philip turned at the sound of Jock's coming, and as he stepped into the roadway, greeted him: "Well met, Hetherington! In truth, you're a laggard at your rendezvous. Here I've stood waiting for you these four hours. I'm drenched, man, fair drenched to the bone."

In all reason, Philip's attitude and his headlong words were friendly enough, yet, to Jock's lurking suspicion, there was something sinister in this unwonted affableness. Three paces from Philip he halted and stood eying him.

Philip still rattled blithely on: "All's well at Clegden. Your fishing master weighs anchor, if the wind favor, at dawn to-morrow. I've here in hand ten marks wherewith you may line your pockets, and hark ye, Hetherington, will you do me the kindness to tighten that scurvy girth that has slipped yet again? My horse is restive so I may not take my hand from his head."

The request had come so smothered in words that, without weighing it in all its bearings, Jock stepped forward instinctively to do as he was asked. It was well for him in that moment that deep within his being his suspicions already were astir. As he bent to tighten the girth he cast a glance over his shoulder, and he looked just in time to see Philip dash back his cloak and swing up the hand that held the pistol.

Jock leaped aside and in the movement felt the rush of the bullet that grazed his cheek. He saw the road and the

trees and the very sky the hue of blood, and in that blood-stained haze he sprang upon the chestnut-haired Philip. He heard afar a mad clatter of hoofs, as the horse broke away and fled, and he felt within his hands something that yielded, something that he knew for Philip's throat. Vaguely he was aware of childish blows that beat down upon his head, and heeding them not at all, he tightened the grip of his hands. Then he found himself in the road with a struggling body pinned beneath his knees, and he saw amid the red Philip's distorted face, and he heard him scream aloud for mercy. In answer he drove his clenched fist into the blood-smeared face, and struck and struck again till he made the cries to cease.

While Philip lay bleeding and unconscious, Jock fumbled through his pockets and he found but five shillings and odd pence. The ten marks for his use had been a lie, then, even as had been Philip's semblance of friendship, even as, he doubted not, had been the story of the ship at Clegden. "Still, I can't go back to Graystones," he swiftly reviewed his case, "so I must needs go forward. Helped or unhelped, I'll get me unto Clegden and see if shipping thence is to be found."

Before he started on his journey, however, Jock tied Philip, hand and foot, with strips that he cut from Philip's own cloak, and he picked up the pistol, dropped in the scuffle, and charged it afresh with Philip's ball and powder. At the very moment while Jock stood, pistol in hand, Philip opened his eyes and looked upon him. With grim satisfaction Jock realized that Philip saw now what he himself had seen and trembled at only a few minutes before — a threatening sky and a dank wood, a lonely road, and a man with murder in his look. He understood Philip's terror, but he did not understand how the man, made in a man's likeness, should whimper for pity.

"Only loose me, Hetherington!" the chestnut-haired Philip

whined. "My finger slipped on the trigger. 'Twas by accident that I gave fire, I swear it! I'm ready to help you to escape. I — Man!" His voice rose piteous and shrill. "You would not slay me?"

Jock fingered the pistol. "Dead men tell no tales," he said.

At that ominous phrase Philip struggled to rise, the while he poured out fresh pleadings. "For the love of God, Hetherington! I cannot die. You know not. I cannot die and go to face mine uncle, he that is dead —"

"He that through my cousin's deed you slew," Jock answered, and then, an apt pupil to learn the methods of the Heyrouns, he cocked the pistol and bent over the prostrate man. "Tell me what you did with the deal box," he bade in a deadly quiet voice.

Gulping in his throat, Philip contrived to answer: "I have it not. Your cousin had the box and the later will of the two. He would not yield it up to me — he would not so much as let me look thereon —"

"So?" said Jock. "And the earlier will — what have you done with it?" As Philip mumbled his lips and kept silent, Jock leaned nearer with the pistol. "Answer!" he bade.

Philip writhed where he lay, but, looking into the muzzle of the pistol, answered perforce: "The earlier will — the one that gives all unto me — 'tis hid, there at Graystones. It will come to light later, when these suspicions against me are set at rest — these injurious suspicions."

Jock laughed.

"'Twould have come to light in such fashion that none would have connected me with the finding of it," Philip continued to disburden himself, with piteous eagerness to placate the man with the pistol. "But that took time — and a sure man to help me. And I would do naught till I could discover what has come of that other will — the later will that may

undo me. Captain Hetherington took it. He took it and he swore that I should pay him henceforth such moneys as he needed, else he would send it to Inchcome. He played false. As God sees me, 'tis the truth I speak!"

"I believe you!" said Jock. "It sounds uncommon like my cousin's merry mood of jesting." For an instant he hesitated, considering in what manner this information was likely best to serve him, and then he had made up his mind. "If Wogan retakes me," he said succinctly, "I shall tell him by whose aid I came forth of Graystones yesternight and show him the key to my door in witness thereof, and I shall tell Martin Heyroun that one of the missing wills at least will be found in your possession. So, my good sir, when your kinsmen come to seek and succor you, I do counsel you, for your credit's sake, to tell them that which shall keep Wogan off my tracks."

"I swear to do it!" protested Philip. "I'll say to Wogan aught that you wish."

"Then do you say to him," said Jock, "that I have fled inland — inland, mark you, as you value your credit, and more than your credit!" With the words on his lips, he thrust the pistol into his belt, and turning from Philip, headed along the road to Clegden and the sea.

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE PLACE OF DESOLATION

AT Draycote too the day had broken gray and threatening, so that Isabel Heyroun, weatherwise as became a long-established dweller in those parts, foretold a storm. "And a shrewd one, too, else I read all signs amiss," she prophesied. "Do but mark how the wind rustles in the leaves of the poplars." For the moment she had paused in her tasks and she stood, as she spoke, at the open window of the dairy that looked across the flagged yard to the row of poplars that rose above the wall of the stable-court.

Close beside Isabel, at the smooth-scoured table, Althea was moulding butter into firm yellow pats, and at the words she looked up and smiled. "'Tis sweet to know yourself in snug shelter when a storm is brewing," she said shyly, and she meant far more than she said. With all her heart she was grateful for these days of peace at Draycote and for the bustling, brisk-tongued kindness of her hostess.

Eager to serve Isabel, even to read her next wish, Althea kept her eyes upon her as she worked, and presently she saw Isabel bend nearer to the window, and then turn, half laughing, half pitiful. "Althea," said Isabel, "'tis that kind soul my sister, Susanna Cooke, come a-visiting from Barbroke, and as at most times, she is a-weeping."

Scarcely had the words passed Isabel's lips when Susanna Cooke, all bespattered with mire and with untidy wisps of hair straggling from beneath her hood, pushed open the

door and came stumbling into the cool dimness of the dairy. She was older than either her brother Lambert or her sister Isabel, a stout woman of five and thirty, with a lax and tremulous mouth. Her scared, innocent eyes were dim with tears, her tremulous mouth twitched, and at sight of her sister she burst into loud sobbing.

"Oh, Bel! Bel!" she wailed, and heedless of Althea's presence, cast herself into her sister's arms. "You must prevent him! You have a nimble wit! Bethink you now and speedily, else our Lambert, our only brother, is ruined and undone. His banns were called yesterday in the church at Barbroke. He is to be wed a week from Sunday — he is to be wed to that — to that cockatrice, Blanche Mallory!"

In a spasm of weeping Susanna choked and grew incoherent, but Isabel shed never a tear. She pushed her sister from her, and untying her apron with a jerk, began to fold it with the swift deliberation of a soldier preparing for battle. "How did it come to pass?" she asked in a dangerous voice.

Mindful of Blanche's frank acknowledgment of her matrimonial plans, Althea felt that she could have answered that question. Discreetly, however, she waited for Susanna's account, while she felt herself torn between the inclination to pity Wogan's sisters and the counter-inclination to rejoice that Wogan, Jock's enemy, should have fallen headlong into Blanche's trap. Then Susanna got breath and spoke again, and ere she was done Althea had lost all inclination to make merry.

Said Susanna: "I do not understand — but Lambert set all forth most plausibly. He says that Blanche is innocent of all because Hetherington is guilty. 'Twas the day before yesterday, the Saturday, that Hetherington — 'tis not for me to tell more than that he so far mistook that he thought himself in camp again and her sweet mistress-ship a woman of the camps."

Isabel spoke in a terrible voice, "In that he was not so far mistaken."

Althea spoke never a word, but she saw the dairy walls recede in shadows. She leaned against the table lest she fall, while at a great distance, it seemed, she heard Susanna, with interrupting sobs and hiccoughs, ramble on.

"So Blanche told all to Lambert, showing how cruelly she had been misjudged. 'Twas for the sake of a young maid in the household, one Althea Lovewell, that was afore-time mad with love for Captain Hetherington, that she sought to have speech with him, only to save that silly child, and she durst not tell the whole story even unto Lambert, partly for that she would not betray the young girl's folly and partly from shame, for that the Captain presently did cast his loose affections upon her, and so —"

Althea began to laugh and swayed where she stood with her laughter. "Oh, a brave tale!" she cried. "Pure, spotless Blanche, and this light jade, Althea Lovewell, and that evil Captain Hetherington, — it rings true, does it not?" Then somehow she found herself clutching Isabel's arm, and she heard Susanna weeping still, and she heard her own voice, high and quavering. "Mistress Heyroun! It is a lie — you know it is a lie! Jock was never the man to deal thus foully. You know Jock Hetherington."

"I had no need to know Jock to know that Blanche Mallory lies," said Isabel. She measured her words, but there was neither measure nor moderation in her smouldering eyes. "Have done with your wailing, Susanna! For that junct, Blanche Mallory, we will take order with her. We will break that marriage. You shall help us, Althea."

"Yes, yes!" said Althea, and she saw beyond the shadows that had dimmed her eyes and she heard her voice ring firm again. "Aught in this world I will do that may clear Jock of such a shameful charge."

"We'll ride at once to Graystones," Isabel cut her short. "You shall tell Lambert — he will listen to you — that Jock is not Captain Hetherington, that Blanche has lied to him in that, and you shall tell him the mere truth, that you had naught to do aforetime with the Captain — that it was Blanche, Blanche, always Blanche!"

In blank astonishment Althea looked at the speaker. Because Isabel was older than she, she had trusted blindly that Isabel would devise some way to save Lambert and to clear Jock, and now she stood half amazed, half pitiful, at the childishness of Isabel's plan. Girl though she was, she could herself see far more clearly.

"Oh, this will not avail!" she cried. "I have said that Jock is not the Captain, and they will not believe me. And for the other matter, it is my word against Blanche's, and which of us will Captain Wogan believe? He will swear that I am but lying to smirch Blanche and to shield Hetherington because he is my lover. He will believe me the thing of shame that Blanche has named me. He —"

Then, all in an instant, Isabel, to her lasting sorrow, lost hold upon her temper. With a face set like her brother's, she caught Althea by the shoulders and shook her savagely. "You graceless beggar brat!" she cried. "You could save my brother. You will not try. For your foolish, prudish whimsies you will not try — you that I have sheltered — you that Rafe has befriended —"

Althea drew herself up, free of Isabel's hands. "I shall ask no more of your kindness," she said, white-lipped and low-voiced, and in the silence that had fallen, while even Susanna stared, too terrified to weep, passed out of the dairy.

It took Althea but an instant to run up the stairs to the chamber that she had shared with little Eleanor, to make a bundle of her garments and to don her cloak, and then, with

head erect, she passed out of the farmhouse. Deep in her heart, for all her proud bearing, she realized to her shame that she half hoped that Isabel might intercept her with an apology that she could take, but, experienced in the Wogan stubbornness to maintain an error once made, she knew that that hope was vain. Unchecked, unhindered, even as she had expected to be, she crossed the dooryard and made her way down the lane that led to the highroad and the vast, desolate world that lay beyond.

At the end of the lane Althea paused a moment, uncertain whither to turn. Very literally she stood at a parting of the ways. Behind her the lane led back to Draycote. Before her the highroad ran on her right hand, by west and south, to Graystones, and on the left eastward, to the village of Clegden. She could not return to Draycote, and she would not return to Graystones. If she had had good reason for quitting the house, she had equally good reason now for staying away.

"If I could help Jock Hetherington by going thither, 'twere another matter," she reflected. "But I cannot help him. Instead I were more like to do him hurt — even as I did at Draycote," she added with a catch in her breath.

So she stood outcast, shelterless, while she felt the first drops of the threatened storm touch wetly on her hands and face, and then, as she let her eyes travel along the road that led to Clegden, she had a veritable inspiration. Near that village, she remembered, dwelt one of her few acquaintances, an old woman, Tamsine Hendie by name, who long ago had been nurse to Althea's mother. She lived now in a wretched hut on an islet at the mouth of the river Illey, with her son Phineas, a thriftless ne'er-do-well who professed to be a fisherman. For her mother's sake Althea had sought out old Tamsine, and twice had spent an hour with her. She had honestly liked the old body, but she had not liked hulking Phineas

Hendie. On his account she had ceased her visits to the islet, but now, in her extremity, she was ready to scoff at her instinctive dislike to the fellow and to remember only his mother's kindness and her oft-repeated desire to be of service.

"I am no child to be afeard of aught," she concluded boldly. "I'll go straightway unto Mother Hendie. 'Tis better to lie under her roof than to lie in the wet grass. And to-morrow — well, if I can think of naught else, I can at least go out to service and so maintain myself. Sure, I've had experience enough in serving of my kinswomen!"

Having thus made up her mind, Althea set forward briskly on her walk to Clegden. It was a distance of seven miles and better, and toward the last she went but slowly, for she was tired and the way was heavy with mire and her eyes were blinded with rain. Not till two hours past noon did she reach the ford on the river Illey which she must cross to gain the southern shore, along which ran the path to Mother Hendie's islet.

Near the ford stood a group of mouldy cottages, the only habitations on either bank from that point to the sea, and in the reeking forecourt of one of them, not ten paces from the ford, lingered a man who touched his forelock as Althea hurried by. "Tide's setting strong, mistress," he said. "Ye'll find the fording safer now than 'twill be an hour hence."

Althea thanked him, but she did not lay to heart his warning. She saw the Illey, at that moment a shrunken stream of harmless brown water, and with no fear of it she picked her way across the stepping stones, and turning her face seaward, hurried along her chosen path.

The rain was now falling in great sheets, and Althea felt the chill of the cold drops strike through her cloak to her very flesh. She tried to step more briskly, but her shoes were cumbered with wet clay and her bundle was a burden to her cold

and aching hands. Breathless and outworn, she halted a moment, and putting back the wet hair that lashed her forehead, looked about her. Far away across the brown flats and the widening stream of brown water, she could just discern the outlines of the low-lying northern bank, blurred and obscured by the rain, and on the southern shore, she saw only marshes that spread away as far as eye could reach. Here and there a land-locked pool wrinkled under the spatter of the rain, but except for such sinister movement, she saw no sign of life.

In a world of rain and desolation Althea hurried on once more, waist-deep in dank sedges, until after a long time she heard beyond the grayness that masked the east the faint boom of the great sea. Confident that she must be near to her chosen haven, she gathered heart to run a few paces forward, and a moment later she stood at the margin of the flats, and looked, and was dismayed. Just as she had remembered it, she saw the little islet that she had sought, a mere ill-joined heap of earth, patched with gorse and fringed with sedges, and at its highest point she saw the outlines of the sagging roof of Mother Hendie's weatherbeaten hut and of the ramshackle lean-to that huddled beneath its eaves, but, not as she had remembered the scene, she saw between herself and the islet a stream of sullen gray water that was full five rods across. Here, within sound of the sea, the Illey was no longer a river but an estuary, and what with the incoming tide and the rising wind, an estuary that the boldest might well hesitate to ford.

But, as it chanced, Althea, who was by birth a Heyroun and a Holcroft, came of two strains of blood that did not lack courage, nor, moreover, obstinacy to carry out a plan once resolved upon. Amid the wash of the foam-streaked water she could make out the brown surfaces of the stepping stones that formed a passage to the islet, and she decided to risk

the crossing. She knew that in June she had crossed by those stepping stones, even at flood-tide, and, inland bred, she did not know the difference between the tides of sunny June and of wind-lashed October.

In this resolution she tucked up her gown, and grasping her bundle fast, began her dangerous passage. For a little distance she found the way easy, upon great, dry stones that stood near together, so that she applauded her wisdom in making the attempt. At the fifth stone, however, a sudden upward swell of the incoming tide filled her shoes with icy water, and she felt the chill of it strike to her heart. All at once she seemed, to her startled fancy, to be walking through the midst of the sea, and she needed all her reason to assure herself that indeed the stepping stones were there, even though she could not see them, half buried as they were beneath the rush of the waters.

A second wave, foaming round her ankles, warned her to make haste. With her sodden petticoat and her heavy cloak dragging upon her, she floundered forward from stone to stone, half blinded with the rain drops that were thick upon her eyelashes, half deafened with the surging of the waves about her. She was ankle-deep in water, she was knee-deep, and she felt the tug of the waves, resistless, terrible as the rushing current in a mill-race, and then she thought to see the whole gray surface of the river arch upward, like the undulation of a huge snake. She had space neither to cry out nor to struggle, only space for the thought, "A greater wave than any, and I shall surely drown!" Next instant she heard the crash as the waters closed over her head. She felt herself whirled along helpless, beaten, buffeted, and in that age-long flight while her hands clutched wildly and closed on emptiness, her heart was quiet, for she saw dear and remembered faces, and she saw Jock's face, and she wondered in what fashion the tidings of her end would come to him.

Then, to her amazement, she found herself alive. Half drowned, choked, breathless, she clung to something that was firm, and she saw the gray waves foaming past her. Of a sudden she was afraid to die. Piteously she looked for succor, and then she saw that the wave that had swept her from the stepping stones had borne her upstream, almost beyond the inmost point of the island, yet, by a caprice of mercy, had carried her toward the island. She was clinging to the rotten shell of an abandoned boat that lay within a few feet of the shore, and on the shore was safety.

Tremblingly she worked her way, wading breast-deep, alongside the boat toward the shore. Once and twice she braced herself against the shock of the piling waves, and almost gave herself for lost as she felt them surge to her very lips, but she found that her hold on the boat was unslackened, and she found too that the water through which she waded was growing shallow. She waded knee-deep, she waded ankle-deep, and then at last she heard the pebbles on the margin rattle beneath her foot.

She had gained the shore, and in blind terror of the danger that was past, she stumbled inland as fast as her feet would bear her. As she climbed the hill she felt the gorse bushes catch at her petticoat, and she shuddered in the belief that once more the waves were dragging her back. Breathless and gasping, she stumbled at last into the worn pathway that led from a little spring to the hut, and she found comfort in the mere act of setting her feet where human feet so recently had passed. Surely, at Mother Hendie's hearth she would forget the gray waves. Almost ready to laugh at her peril now that help was so near, she laid her hand to the latch of the sagging door and without ceremony entered the hut.

Once inside the door she paused for a moment and stood blinking till she could accustom her eyes to the dimness of the place. Just opposite her she made out, on the ash-strewn

hearth, a pale glimmer of light that came from the chimney above, and presently she made out too the shapes of a pallet by the wall, a chest in a far corner, a low table, a rude stool or two, but she saw no sign of human creature.

"Mother Hendie!" she spoke hesitatingly, and then, in sudden alarm, called the name aloud. For answer she heard only the patter of the rain on the thatch above her head.

Hurriedly she crossed the little room, and groping, found the door to the lean-to, and opened it and looked in. Better wonted now to the dim light, she saw a bucking tub, and a broken form, and a litter of tools, and odds and ends of wood, and a half-rotted fish-net, but she saw no sign of the old woman on whose kindness she had relied.

In that hour it seemed to Althea that the earth had been struck from beneath her feet. She dragged herself to the cold hearth where she had looked to find a fire, and then she fell a-shivering and burst into passionate sobs. Partly she cried for sheer misery, because she was very cold and wet, and partly for bitter disappointment, because she must go uncomforted beneath the roof where she had looked for kindness, and partly too, it must be owned, because she realized now, a little thing, yet a little thing that added to the rest was insupportable, that in the struggle with the waves she had lost her bundle, and in the bundle was a kerchief that had been her mother's.

For an unmarked time she sat and sobbed, while the rain beat steadily upon the roof and now and again a drop fell spattering upon the hearth, and then with an effort of will, for at each movement she felt her wet clothes press clammily against her body, she forced herself to rise and go to the chest by the wall. Too desperate for civility, she searched the chest through, and having found an old, worn smock, cast off her dripping garments and put it upon her. All a-shiver still, she crept to the pallet, and to her joy found there two blankets

and a coverlet. In these she wrapped herself, and then she lay down and prayed that she might be warm again.

Very soon she drifted into a state that was neither waking nor sleeping. She heard, now near, now far, the beat of the rain and the rattle of the door as the wind rose higher. She saw more and more faintly the outlines of the homely objects in the room. These familiar sounds and sights became the background for a phantasmagoria of known and unknown shapes that flitted to and fro till she grew weary with watching their movements. Her head ached, her throat ached. Feverishly she wished that the shapes might pass and she be left in peace.

Of a sudden Althea found that the first part of her wish was granted. The shapes had passed indeed, and once more she was broad awake. How long it was since she had entered the hut, she knew not, but she knew that all round her it was pitchy dark and the wind was blowing a gale. She could feel the frail hut shake in the blast. She was sitting up in her bed and she was icy cold, but she knew that this was different from the cold that came from drenched garments. She felt this coldness grip her very heart. She was afraid—afraid of the dark, and the sound of the wind, and the loneliness of that little islet, which in her mind's eye she seemed to see, a desolate speck in the midst of the avid gray waves. For this fear she called herself a coward, and trying to be brave as her father would have wished her to be, she was just lying down again, when in a lull of the wind she heard the door rattle, and rattle, as she knew, beneath the touch of a hand. In that instant she knew what it was that had chilled her heart with fear.

For one second Althea felt the impulse to cower beneath her coverings. Indeed she felt the impulse still, and she only marvelled to find that, without conscious resolve, she had risen softly from the bed. With a strange sense of standing

aloof and watching her own scene of anguish, she knew that she had snatched up the coverlet and noiselessly was stealing across the icy floor of trodden clay to the door of the lean-to. She pushed the door ajar just as she heard the outer door clash open beneath the intruder's hand.

Down in her heart she knew that the man must be Phineas Hendie, the ne'er-do-well, and because of that knowledge she was fleeing, she cared not whither. Noiselessly, for very life, she closed the door of the lean-to behind her and stole across the cumbered space. At the far side of the lean-to, she remembered, was a window, closed with a shutter, through which she hoped to escape into the storm. On tiptoe she groped to find the bar that held the shutter, and found it after long striving, and could not stir it from its place.

For a heartsick moment she crouched on the floor beneath the window. In the main room of the hut she could hear the man stumbling about, hurtling against stools and table, and growling inarticulately as he did so. She judged him far gone in drink, and in the terror of the thought pressed her hands to her mouth to hold back a cry.

Presently she noted that the noise grew less and at last died altogether, so that almost she dared to hope that the man had sunk down to sleep, when suddenly, straight across the darkness, she spied a rift of light. It shone, she realized, beneath the door to the lean-to. In the main room the man had lit a candle, and busied in that task had fallen silent. His next movement, no doubt, since he was sober, would be to seek firewood, and the wood was stored in the lean-to.

In that moment of realization Althea heard again footsteps crossing the main room, and saw the crack of light broaden. She rose and stood at her full height, with the coverlet drawn about her and her arms crossed upon her breast, in her wonted gesture in extremity. She heard the door go back with a

clang, she saw the glare of a candle that wavered in the gust of the bearer's movement, and beneath the candle she saw the man's white face and dripping hair and alert eyes.

She took a step forward, swaying as she went. "Oh, I thank God!" she said in a voice that was hardly more than a whisper, and held forth both her trembling hands. "Oh, Jock! Jock Hetherington!"

CHAPTER XVIII

PASSAGE PERILOUS

WHEN Althea was laid once more on the pallet with the blankets heaped about her, and the fire was blazing high on the hearth, Jock searched the shelves that were nailed against the wall, till he found meal and salt, and then he set porridge to cook. Through half-closed eyelids Althea watched him, while she felt the blessed warmth creep to her chilled body. In the pauses of the wind she still could hear the thrumming of rain upon the thatched roof, and at times she felt the ramshackle hut shiver in the sudden gusts, but she had no longer any terror of the dark or of the storm. From the extremity of peril and of fright she had come, how, she scarcely realized, to safe harborage, and without question she yielded herself to the sweet, unwonted sensation of being cared for and served.

Presently Jock came to her bedside with a wooden bowl full of the smoking porridge and bade her eat. "'Tis vengeance hot," he warned, "but 'twill surely comfort you."

As she took the bowl from his hands she looked upon him. Beneath his clinging, half-dried shirt, she could see the clean outlines of his compact young figure and the swelling muscles of his arms and shoulders, and she realized as never before the strength that was in him. Half dubiously she let her eyes travel to his face, and when she saw the unaccustomed kindness that had softened his shrewd eyes and relaxed the set line of his lips, she felt such a passion of gratitude that he, so hard and strong, should bear himself gently toward

her, of all creatures, that she wanted but little of adoring him outright. Terrified lest he read to her very soul, she let her eyes fall, and then, half sick and overwrought as she was, she felt the tears come.

"Ha' done!" said Jock. "Else you'll make a fair hand at cooling your porridge, kinswoman."

At that Althea contrived to laugh, albeit chokedly. "Indeed, Jock," she said, "I'm a fool and to spare, for already this day I've had salt water enough to content me to the end of my life."

Then while she made pretence of eating, she talked, and grew the steadier as she heard her own voice. She described her desperate struggle to reach the islet, and told of Mother Hendie and of Phineas and how she had come thither to seek their hospitality, but of the reason for her expulsion from Draycote she said never a word. "And now, in your turn," she bade, "what kind chance was it brought you hither?"

Thus entreated, Jock sat down on the table hard by the pallet, and very briefly told her that he had made shift a second time to escape from Graystones. "I am going now to Clegden—or wherever else Heaven pleases!" he amended somewhat bitterly, "where I may get shipping out of the kingdom, but I had not taken to consideration this accursed river Illey. I tried to cross the ford in the darkness, and I wanted but little of walking into the arms of two honest cuddens that guarded the passage."

"So 'twas for that they kept their watch," Althea murmured. She remembered the man who had spoken a warning to her at the ford, and she understood now why he had waited there in the drenching rain.

"I could not turn inland," Jock continued, "so I needs must turn seaward. I found a path and I followed it, and in time I came to some stepping stones. I could see naught

for the storm, but I held that the stepping stones should lead to the northern bank, so I ventured." After a moment he added, "I spoilt the most of my powder, and that was worst of all."

Characteristically he had not mentioned the fact that he had been very nearly drowned in his passage to the islet, but Althea guessed at what he left unsaid and shuddered for his peril. "And after all you have not gained the northern bank," she lamented, "and you can never swim the northern channel. 'Tis deeper and more dangerous by far than the southern channel that you have crossed. You are stayed here on the islet, and you are losing time — oh! such precious time! You must press on, Jock, at once, — indeed you must! If Lambert Wogan takes you, he will have no mercy on you now."

She bit her tongue as soon as she had let the words slip, but it was too late, for Jock had heard and caught her meaning. "So the story has reached Draycote," he said. "They told you —"

"They told me the false tale that Mistress Mallory told," Althea made answer.

Jock bent his head, fingering the edge of the table on which he sat. "I thank you much for that word 'false,'" he said at last in a low voice.

Once more he mended the fire, and then he came again to the bed, and taking the bowl, chided Althea because she had not eaten more of the porridge.

"Indeed I could not!" she pleaded. "My throat is painful when I swallow — and I am not a-hungred." There she put forth her hand timidly and laid it on his hand. "You bear in mind the counsel that I gave? Oh, Jock! You will go hence at once? You will escape while yet there may be time?"

He laughed outright. "Do you think me a great fish that

you would have me to swim farther?" he asked. "Nay, Althea, I've no mind to trust myself on such a night to the mercies of a river that I do not know. With your good leave, I'll shelter me here till morning break and I can see my path. 'Twas with that purpose that I first broke into this hut."

He had spoken truthfully when he said that he dared not attempt to swim the raging Illey in the darkness, but he had not spoken the entire truth. Besides the regard for his own safety that held him on the island, there was consideration for the girl. He knew that she was come from an ordeal of terror and cold that were enough to sap the strength of any woman, and he saw in her flushed cheeks and bright eyes signs that he dreaded to confess were signs of fever. He could not well press on and leave her alone in that desolate cottage, until he was sure, beyond all doubt, that she was not going to be sick and, in her sickness, helpless.

For the present he could do nothing but wait and see how it might fare with her after a few hours' sleep, and while he waited, by old habit, he did those things that were immediate and necessary. He ate some porridge, he mended the fire softly, for he gathered from Althea's breathing that at last she was fallen asleep and he would not disturb her. When these tasks were done, he took up his wet doublet, which he had cast off when he first had entered the hut, and spread it before the blaze to dry. Then it was, as he sat tending the fire, that his eyes fell on the sodden little heap of Althea's wet garments.

With none save practical thoughts, he took up the dripping smock and the blue underpetticoat and the little tawny-colored gown, and wrung the water from them, but as he spread them to the fire he found that the current of his thought was altered. They were such little clothes, so frail and girl-like. He fingered the tawny-colored gown lightly, and drew

back his hand half ashamed, as if he had made free with Althea herself.

When he had sat down again, ready at need to tend the fire, he kept glancing at the little garments laid to dry. They were so like the girl. She was such a piteous slip of a thing. He felt his throat grow thick as he remembered how lost and little and forlorn she had looked when he first had spied her, there in the dark of the lean-to. Still with that thickening in the throat, he recalled how she had come forward in perfect trust, with arms held out to him — to him of whom they had told her their vile stories.

"By the faith of man, when she says she believes me honest she must mean it!" he muttered.

Step by step he followed her wanderings, the story of which she had told him so courageously, with such a resolute effort to turn all to a jest. In his mind's eye he saw her lonely little figure plodding along the rain-swept path by the river, venturing timidly upon the treacherous stepping stones, and then, lessoned by his own experience of the deadly peril of that passage, he felt his heart die within him, as he saw her borne from her feet and struggling with her poor strength against that mighty tide.

In a sudden reek of terror lest his imagining were true, lest she were indeed lost forever among the gray waves, he rose and went to the pallet. She lay as he had left her, with one hand beneath her cheek and her face turned toward the fire. She breathed a little hurriedly, her cheeks were ruddier than their wont, but for the moment he paid small heed to those warnings of danger. Instead he noted the way in which her half-dried hair fell loosely curling about her shoulders and, dark in the shadows, caught a tint of gold from the firelight, and he noted the way in which her lashes rested in a dark line upon her cheeks. For the first time, in all the times that he had looked upon the girl, he realized, seeing her asleep, the

loveliness of her smooth brow and her boyish, well-turned chin and her white throat. With a sudden shiver he drew back. Like a child in her helplessness and weakness she had made her mute appeal for his protection, but in that moment he laid the knowledge to heart that she was far more than child.

Slowly he returned to his place by the fire. There were long pauses in his task of renewing the blaze, and in such pauses, while he listened to the storm that beat about the hut, he thought disjointedly and, reviewing much that he had planned and done in earlier years, looked back, as it were from a height, and saw the folly of it. More than once in his life he had looked upon a woman. No better than his fellows, he had bargained for a kiss, and paid the price and taken the goods, and gone lightly on his way. But always, unlike many of his fellows, he had realized that the woman who some day should be his wife must be of another mould.

Practically, unsentimentally, as was his habit, he had inventoried the virtues that that unknown woman must possess. Of gentle blood she must be, assuredly, of unsullied reputation, with a fair face and a modest carriage, and — on that point he had had no doubts! — with a dowry, the richer, the better. Since he had himself no heritage but his sword, his wife, he reasoned logically, must not only bring money for the family coffer, but the very coffer in which to stow it. These virtues, he realized, were many to require of one woman, but he was a patient man and nothing loath to wait. If he married at twenty-eight or thirty, that were early enough, he reckoned, and so he should have ample time in which to find the useful paragon that he sought.

Now, as he sat by the fire with his eyes upon Althea's gown, he saw that practical scheme of marriage, of which he had been so proud, as the idle daydream of a foolish lad. He did not want that comely, virtuous gentlewoman with the com-

fortable dowry. He wanted Althea, poor, little, outcast, penniless Althea. Struggling to reconcile desire with trusted reason, he told himself that he turned to Althea because she was kind and staunch-hearted, and full of trust in him, and had blue eyes and a flashing smile, and at that point, with an impatient outfling of the hands, he bade reason go hang. He wanted Althea because he loved her, because, he realized now, to his frank surprise, he had loved her since the moment when from his prison window he had watched her at work in the sunshine of the Graystones garden.

He trailed away into dreams, as profitless as that of the dowried gentlewoman which he now so despised. He was young, and the world was wide. Somewhere, somehow, he must make Althea his. He caught breath sharply. Oh, what if that day were come! If this were his own roof that sheltered him, and the girl that slept yonder were indeed his wife, his own, his own!

On the hearth a log broke and fell apart in a drift of white ashes, and at the sound Jock started, recalled to the world about him. By the heaviness that oppressed him he judged that it must be the odd hour between night and morning, a time that is death to illusion. He knew himself now for what he was, a penniless, friendless vagabond, a fugitive prisoner with every man's hand against him. It was by merest chance that he could hope to escape recapture and, if not death at Wogan's hands, a term of servitude in Barbadoes that would be limited only by the length of his life. If he did contrive to escape by a miracle, what life was his that he should ask the girl he loved to share it? Surely, to love her truly were to leave her free.

At that moment he heard Althea speak his name. He hesitated, steadying himself with effort, and then went slowly to the pallet. "A draught of water," she begged.

He fetched the water, but she took only a sip. "My throat

— 'tis all one hurt," she said, looking up at him piteously. Her cheeks were glowing and her eyes were bright.

Presently, after restless turning in her bed, she slept again, but this time her sleep was broken. Bitterly thankful to be thus distracted from his brooding, Jock listened for any sound that might betray her need of him, and soon, to his anxiety, heard her mutter in her sleep. He offered her water, the only comfort that he had to give, but she shook her head, and soon was moaning and tossing as before. Her moans began to shape themselves to feverish murmurs. "The waves! Oh, the gray waves all about me!" she cried once; and again, "Oh, help me! Help me!" He knew that once more she struggled for life in the rising tide, and powerless to give aid, he could only sit and hope that peace and the relief of quiet sleep might come to her at last.

Slowly the wind-swept dawning broke, and a first dull gleam of light crept down the wide chimney. Jock saw, and, heavy-headed with long musing and anxiety, rose up to cross the hut and set the window wide. At that moment from the pallet he heard Althea moan aloud: "The waters! Oh, they gain upon me!" and in the vain hope that he might be of comfort, he went to her.

He found her half risen in her bed, and her eyes were wide and in them was no trace of recognition. "The waters! The waters!" she moaned still; and then with a sudden cry, "Oh, father! Father!"

He stood dumbfounded till she reached forth and caught his hand and laid her cheek against it. "Daddy, dear! You've been long!" she whispered.

Then he knew that in delirium she mistook him for her father, that long-dead Sam Lovewell, and at the thought he stood afraid and half ashamed. "Althea! Don't you know me?" he urged.

She lifted her burning face. "Kiss me!" she murmured. "Kiss your lass!"

He hesitated. So nearly did her pleading run with the desire that in the watches of the night he had bitted and bridled, that for a moment, even to give her ease, he dared not comply. Then "God forgive me!" he muttered, and bent, shamefaced yet eager, and kissed her forehead.

She leaned, trusting and secure, against the arm that he had slipped about her. With a sudden clenching of the teeth, he sat himself down on the pallet, and lifting her, in her blankets, pillowed her head upon his shoulder. "Have no fear, little lass," he said. "'Tis your father holds you now, in truth, and you're safe — safe!"

Several times yet she stirred; once she murmured aloud: "The waves! Keep me from them!" but at last, better than he had dared to hope, she relaxed in his arms and slept quietly. Minute after minute, hour after hour, he sat and held her, while he watched the gray light that came stronger through the crack of the shuttered window, and listened to the patter of rain on the roof that dwindled and at last ceased. He felt the pain that shot through his arm that supported her weight, and then he sensed that the arm was numb, that all one side of his body was numb, and in the torture of his cramped position he knit his brows and clenched his free hand. But he could hear that the girl breathed regularly now, and when, half deprecatingly, he glanced at her face, he saw that the flush was fading from her cheeks.

The fire on the hearth died down, but he would not risk waking the girl by rising to rekindle it. He knew that she was warmly wrapped, and for himself, when the room grew cold he shivered and endured, until on the hearth he saw the gleam of light that was his clock begin to fade. Mid-afternoon was come, and for hours he had held the girl, and at last he found that the strength was not in him to hold her longer. Gently, with all the craft that was in his outworn body, he slipped his numbed arm from about her and eased her down

into the bed with his other hand. He rose from his place beside her, yet for an instant he paused, with eyes upon her face, like a white flower in the shadow of her disordered hair, and then, weary and exhausted, he let the devil take the upper hand.

"T'other time was for your father, my own dear!" he whispered. "This time 'tis for myself, and all I'm ever like to have!" He bent to the girl's lips, and he saw how easily she slept in her trust of him, the trust for which he had been grateful, and, red and shamed and sick at heart for his sorry self, he stood erect again.

At that moment, without warning, Althea opened her eyes, and her own soul looked from them. She smiled weakly up at him where she lay. "Why, Jock!" said she. "I've surely slept."

"Ay," he said huskily, and in his heart gave humble thanks that, by a greater boon than he deserved, she had not waked an instant earlier.

"At first I had troubled dreams," she went on, "but at the last — oh! my sleep has been sweet and I have had none but good dreams."

From the depth of his heart he answered, "I thank God for that!"

CHAPTER XIX

TWO AND A BARGAIN

IN the wind-driven dawn of the next morning Jock left Althea asleep, and for the first time went forth to look about him. With satisfaction he scanned the swollen waters of the Illey where no craft was likely to venture, and the low, marshy banks of the river where no sign of life was visible, and the harried sky of ink-dashed gray, in itself a menace sufficient to keep all prowlers within doors. Up to that moment he had feared lest the smoke from the hut should betray to some loiterer the presence of unlawful tenants upon the islet, but now he was rid of that fear. In such weather there was small likelihood of anyone's strolling along the river paths, and he could count on at least a few hours of security in which to plan what was next to do for himself and for Althea.

Through the drenched gorse and beaten sedges he made his way down to the shore, where a little space of sand and of foot-worn grasses showed that here the fording place and the stepping stones began. He knew it to be the hour of the ebb-tide, when in the nature of things he should find the passage to the mainland easiest, but he saw the waves swirling through the channel and he could discover no sign of the stepping stones. Patiently he sought them, wading to and fro, hip-deep sometimes in the strong current, and he sought in vain. By the violence of wind and water the very bed

of the river had been altered and the fording place blotted out. As far as he could discover, he and Althea were hopelessly cut off from the mainland.

When at last he returned, chilled and shivering, to the shore, he lingered moment after moment, under pretext of pacing up and down to warm himself. In truth, he dreaded to go back to the hut and face Althea, while he was burdened with the weight of this evil discovery and, as yet, saw no way of relief. Had he been alone, he had found all easy. Without further stay he would have tried to swim the northern channel of the Illey. He cheerfully admitted that thereby he should have run a fair chance of drowning, but quite honestly he would have preferred to drown rather than to take the risk — a risk that hourly grew greater — of being recaptured by Captain Wogan.

But now that he had Althea to care for, Jock scarcely knew what to do. He could not convey her across a channel that he had no more than an even chance of crossing alone and unencumbered. He could not leave her behind, sick and alone in the deserted hut, with the risk that no one would come thither and she would perish, helpless and forsaken, or with the worse risk that Phineas Hendie, the villainous ne'er-do-well, would come thither without his mother. He could not, on the other hand, remain himself with Althea. That were to court in longer or shorter time discovery, and discovery meant that Althea would go beggared of reputation to the end of her days and that he would be delivered over to Wogan, the fate against which every fibre of his soul and body cried aloud.

He had decided nothing, he could see no way to a decision, but he knew that some time had passed since he had left Althea and he dared stay no longer from her. Heavily he climbed the path to the hut, and after a last glance at the vacant river and the deserted shores, pushed open the door and en-

tered. For an instant he blinked in the dimness of the room, and then he was aware of Althea's face, white and tense, and of her eyes that sought his. She was sitting up in her bed, and her arms were rigidly crossed upon her breast.

"Oh!" she cried in a voice of hard sobbing that startled him. "Are you come back? Jock! Are you come back, indeed? I woke. You were gone. I thought—I thought—" She stopped there, and bending her head, fought silently for self-control.

In that moment Jock drew a long breath of relief, for he knew that his decision at last was made for him. Almost light-heartedly he went to the pallet and bade Althea lie down and rest quiet and have no fear. "Surely, I shall not go hence while you have need of me," he promised.

Now that he had made his decision, he went without further talk about the homely, necessary task of cooking breakfast. He could find only a small store of meal and that little he used in making Althea's porridge. For himself, he had unearthed a hunch of bread, hard and somewhat mouldy, but at the siege of Colchester he had learned not to be over-dainty in the matter of diet.

When they both had eaten, Jock set the room to rights, — not that he hankered for household tasks, but he felt that Althea, womanlike, was worried by the disorder about her. While he worked he talked to her, foolishly and jestingly, in much the same tone that he had used at Draycote. Partly he wanted to win her to laugh and give over her anxiety, and partly he was fain, in the desperate pass to which he now had pledged himself, to snatch what comfort he could, even on the brink of disaster. At first he moved Althea to reply in kind, with the ghost of the old quick smile upon her white face, but after a time he realized that, though her eyes followed him always, her thoughts were straying, and then at last she spoke seriously.

"Nay, Jock, no more of words. We must plan soberly. You see, since I have eaten, I feel myself stronger. Indeed, I am well recovered. You can see that I am!" she pleaded to his impassive face. "And now, Jock, this very hour you must go hence."

Much as he had done two nights before, when he had braced himself against the waves that fought to hurl him from the stepping stones, Jock braced himself now. Stubbornly he held to the dubious, narrow way that, all in an instant, he had resolved to follow, while round him beat and broke the torrent of the girl's arguments and pleadings. He did not find it easy to stand firm, for the girl was no milksop to waste herself in futile tears, and her reasoning, the reasoning that an hour before had been his own, had power to disturb him. He was no paladin to scorn the prospect of bodily hurt, nor was he a fool to believe that Wogan, when he should overtake him, would be likely to clap him on the shoulder and cry quits. When Althea urged him go for his own safety's sake, he felt a coward something within him leap to assent, and angered at that coward self, he crushed it savagely.

"No more of that, Althea!" he said with a sternness that struck her dumb. "Come what may, I stay here upon this island."

Soon she was back to the assault on another, surer line. He must go, then, for her sake. He must not be taken there. Surely he could see!

Yes, he saw so clearly that for a moment he stood perplexed, but then he saw again, not the picture of her bitter shaming that she had faintly limned, but that other vision that aforetime had decided him — the vision of a pale little girl with fever-bright eyes, lying in an empty hut that was cold with the chill of the grave, calling for food when there was no one to hear, calling for water when there was no one to set a cup

to her lips, meeting the terror of death long drawn out, and meeting it alone and uncomforted.

"Peace, peace!" said he. "I cannot go and leave you, and there's an end on't!"

She looked at him in the dim light of the darkened room, and the light was not so dim nor he so little skilled in the reading of her face but that he marked the flame of joy that beacons in her eyes. That he remembered, even as he remembered the piteous thanksgiving in her worn young face at that earlier moment when she had seen him returning, and to those memories he held firmly in the hard minutes that followed. Hard minutes they were indeed, for the girl, weak and weary with sickness, broke down and wept piteously, begging him to leave her, vowing that she would rather die than bring death upon him, and so honestly did she plead that he would have gone near to yielding, had he not known that, so deep within her heart that she was herself scarce conscious of the voice, her truest self was praying him to stay.

Not till afternoon did the warfare of their two wills have an end, and then the girl slept, utterly forspent. Once and twice in her sleep she sobbed aloud, and at the sound Jock reproached himself, wondering if he had done well to resist her, but when at last her eyes opened and instantly sought him, where he sat upon the hearth, he told himself that he had done well. Between them there was now peace, and the twilight hour of that day, when he sat by her and they talked together for the first time as something nearer than comrades, remained with him always as a blessed memory.

Next morning Jock woke where he lay along the hearth, and sat up in vague wonder as to what had brought him the quiet sense of peace that was upon him. He could hear Althea's steady, soft breathing, and on the hearth he glimpsed a touch of brighter light that hinted that at last the sun was shining. He realized too that the hut no longer shivered in

the great gusts of the wind. For quiet air and sunlight and Althea, he found himself giving thanks, and then he smiled, not ungently, and chided himself for a fool. Surely, he appealed to his vaunted reason, he should remember that he was a fugitive, in imminent peril, and then he smiled even more heartily at the folly of that thought. Somehow, on that morning, he could not help feeling that Wogan and Graystones were many leagues behind him, and that by some kind miracle they never would be suffered to overtake him.

Adrift in such contentment, Jock went at last to the door, and moving softly, lest he waken Althea, opened it to the light and the free air. Southward he saw a tumble of white clouds, and rain-washed blue above them, and a fair sun, that well-nigh smote him blind, swinging upward, like a censer, at his left hand. Blinking, he shaded his eyes with his palm and looked lower, to the sun-shotten waters of the Illey, and right off shore he spied a little boat. Upon her thwarts sat two men, and at sight of him they rested on their oars and spoke together.

Jock stepped within the hut, and when he had closed the door behind him, leaned heavily against it. For an instant he was conscious of an agonized waking, like that of a child in a world of bewilderments, and then, restored to his old fighting self, he stepped to the window, hard by the door. This window, all unglazed, was protected by a rude wooden shutter that was in place, but through the crack of the shutter he could overlook the river and the boat and the two men. He saw that they conferred together for a moment, and then they pulled hastily back to the southern shore. The one, a tall fellow, with hair so sun-bleached that it was almost white, hurried away along the path while the other, as if on guard, sat down on the gunwale of the boat.

"White-head has gone with the news to Graystones," Jock

told himself dispassionately. "And t'other knave is left to see that I do not escape hence."

With the zest of hatred in his every movement, as if already he were at hand-grips with his enemies, Jock made his preparations against the coming siege. He fetched water from the spring till every pail in the hut and even the bucking tub was full. He took down a broadaxe that hung in the lean-to, he charged his pistol, he laid on the table, ready to hand, the powder and ball that he had levied from the chestnut-haired Philip, and finally he barred the door and the windows with strips of wood.

In the midst of this noisy task he became for the first time conscious of Althea's presence. He turned toward the pallet, and he saw that she lay wide-eyed and watched him. Though she had not cried out nor troubled him with vain questions, he knew that she realized the desperate pass to which they had come. Her lips were thin. Her hands that rested on the coverlet clenched and unclenched in nervous haste.

"They are coming — the soldiery?" she asked, in a breathless voice.

Jock bowed his head, and then he flung down the hammer that he held and sprang to Althea's side, for she had sunk back with closed eyes and he believed her near to swooning.

At his touch on her shoulder, however, she opened her eyes. "Do not — heed me," she whispered. "Go to your work. I am not afraid."

Because she said it, he knew that she was afraid, and with only half a heart for the conflict, he went back to the window where he had ranged his weapons. He had finished his preparations. He had nothing now to do but to wait, and watch the girl, and think.

About midmorning, as he read the time by the station of the sun, Jock spied through the crack of the shutter a boat of

four oars and then another rowing leisurely down the river. In the boats he made out the gleam of light given back from the steel caps of soldiers. "They are coming," he said, in a voice that unconsciously he lowered, and then over his shoulder he glanced at Althea. She had dragged herself erect and sat with her arms crossed tensely upon her breast. Her face was very white, and in her eyes was a fear more poignant than the fear of death.

In that moment Jock realized that, for the first time in his life, the joy of combat was not for him. In the girl who waited yonder for the issue of the fight, he had given a hostage to Fortune that beat his weapon down and bound his arms. If he should fight now as he had fought at Barbroke, resist with his back to the wall till they struck him dead, what of the girl? He had to answer the question quickly, for his time was short. Already he could see that the foremost boat was nosing to the shore. Before they killed him,—he sketched the future swiftly,—he would make shift to kill a man or two of Wogan's troopers, but then, as he knew well, he would have roused them to fury, and to that fury the hut and the girl that it sheltered would lie defenceless. Had the girl stood before the soldiers as Mistress Lovewell, she might perhaps have challenged forbearance, but now she would be to them no more than Captain Hetherington's light of love.

To himself Jock repeated that phrase and others, more brutal, that he knew would be urged in ample justification of any shame that Althea might suffer, and meanwhile he saw the boats beached and a file of troopers make a landing on the shore below him, and he saw that Wogan led them. Then he made his decision, and looking upon Wogan, he did not find it easy to make.

Pistol in hand, he waited till the troopers were filing up the slope, till Wogan, stolidly marching at the head of the

line, was within forty feet of the hut, and then he thrust the shutter half open and showed himself in the window. "Captain!" he cried. "I'm fain to speak with you."

Instantly the little column was halted. There were twelve soldiers, Jock counted them swiftly, and on their outskirts several of the coast men who had rowed the boats, and among them the white-headed fellow who first had sought the island. Before them all Wogan stood forth. He wore no helmet, but a dark felt hat, slouched forward to ward the sun from his eyes.

"Well!" said Wogan, dryly. "You are free to speak."

"I would speak alone with you, sir," Jock urged, while he prayed for patience to be civil.

Wogan gave a perfunctory sneer: "And what warrant have I that you will not pistol me? How shall I trust to your honor — you that have broken your parole?"

With sudden misgiving, Jock faced a new vista of menace. In the spirit of the law he knew that he had been released from his promise not to try to escape when Wogan, on his own side, broke his corresponding pledge of fair treatment by putting him under lock and key, but he feared, from his knowledge of Puritan subtleties, that, by the letter of the law, he might be held guilty of breach of parole. In any case, the judges of the matter were also his jailers and his sworn enemies, and he kept a clear recollection of Wogan's threat of vengeance in the event of a broken parole. Dumb with dismay, he looked a moment at Wogan, and then, by old habit, he returned, in spite of all, to the task that he had set out to do.

Taking the only course that was left to him, he laid down his pistol and rested his empty hands on the window-ledge before him. "Look you!" said he. "I have put down my arms. Now, sir, in mercy let me speak with you — unless you fear me!"

The taunt had its effect. After all, Wogan was not a coward, and, pricked by Jock's words, he strode up and halted just below the window. "Now, sirrah! Be brief!" he ordered.

For an instant Jock hesitated, and then with a touch of grim humor, he told himself that it was well for him that, as Rafe Heyroun had delighted to remind him, he had been born in Yorkshire where men were steady-headed and audacious in bargaining. Never in his life had he had greater need of shrewd audacity. "Captain," he began in a voice that he lowered lest Althea overhear, "you wish to take me alive?"

"I am going to take you alive," Wogan amended pithily.

Jock showed his teeth in a hateful grin. "You said that at Barbroke. 'Twas not an easy task to take me then. 'Twill be a harder task to take me now. I have a pistol, and powder, and ball. I have a broadaxe for the first man, and perchance the second, that comes through the door. And I have a clasp knife for mine own throat at the last. You will lose a man or two, and you will not take me living, unless you be pleased to grant the terms that I shall name."

Wogan indulged himself in a bitter smile. "You are in no case to dictate terms," he said, and made as if to turn upon his heel.

In silence Jock waited, though he felt his heart leap into his throat. He wondered if Wogan would bear himself as a man with a private grudge, too angered even to hear to a compromise, or as an officer bent to save from needless hazard the lives of the soldiers that followed him. To his relief he found that Wogan, even as he had read him, was after all an officer.

Wogan tried to veil capitulation with a jeer, but he did finally concede: "Come! For the sport of it, I'll hear the terms you offer."

"I will surrender," Jock said in the same low voice, "on two conditions: first, that neither you nor any of your men

shall set foot in this hut, and second, that you shall fetch hither the old woman, Tamsine Hendie. When she comes into the house, I will come forth," — he gulped a little at the words, but he got them out bravely, — "and I will surrender myself unresisting into your hands to deal with as shall please you."

There was an instant's pause. Wogan put back his hat from his forehead and stared, and Jock, without knowing what he did, picked at a sliver on the window-ledge, while his eyes strove to read Wogan to the soul. Then said Wogan, surprised past the point of being angry: "So that little wanton is here with you? I mean that young baggage, the Lovewell wench. She went astray upon the day of the storm. Her kindred have sought her in vain. So she is here — with you!"

Obviously the man was glad, glad to the soul to find one tale at least of Blanche Mallory's telling thus confirmed, and of this satisfaction he quite unconsciously gave Jock the benefit. "Ay, you may have the terms you ask," he conceded almost cheerfully; and then bethought himself and added, as in duty bound: "And you may be thankful that you can be of service to my brother Heyroun, else I should hang you to the nearest tree — you cursed wench!"

With an elation that showed through his semblance of virtuous wrath, Wogan strode away. Jock waited till he had seen him speak a word to the white-headed man, Phineas Hendie, as he now judged his betrayer to be, waited till he had seen Hendie push off and row upstream, and then he ventured a little from the window and spoke softly, "Althea!"

She had been lying face down upon the pallet, but at the sound of his voice she looked up, white and tremulous, and he told her, speaking swiftly, how Wogan had been generous, and Mother Hendie soon would be there to care for her, and none save Wogan and himself would know of her presence

on the islet. At that reprieve he saw her face that had been so white flame to rose, and her tremulous lips smile, and he told himself that after all no price was too great to pay for that rapturous look of hers. So when she was fain to know what was to be his fate, he found it possible to play his part bravely, and laugh, and tell her that Wogan, who was thus generous to a maid, surely would not be quite ungenerous to a man, while all the time he watched out of the tail of his eye lest this much-belauded Wogan should attempt, even then, to circumvent him by some trick.

Wogan kept faith, however, and drew off his men from the hut, so that presently Jock ventured to unbar the door, and Althea, reassured by his calmness, lay down again on the pallet. There she fell asleep, worn out with the anxiety of the past hours, and Jock was half sorry that he must lose these last minutes with her, and half was glad that they both were spared the pain of parting. The most of that sunshiny midday he spent by the window, handling the pistol that he must so soon yield up, and watching the troopers lest they attempt some treachery, but now and again he snatched a moment to steal to Althea's side, and looking upon her, strove to print upon his memory every curve and line and sweet, subtle shadowing of her face.

He wondered whether he most hoped or feared that she might wake before he went and say farewell, but the hope was frustrate and the fear was set at rest, for she still was sleeping, quite outworn, when Hendie's boat made land once more and out of it bundled a brisk old woman, with a weather-beaten face, who came up the steep path as nimbly as a goat. Jock thrust the door half open and in the shadow waited for her coming. At least he knew speedily that the woman was Althea's friend, for from the threshold she cast one glance toward the pallet, and then she cursed him swiftly and fluently, in coastwise speech, for shaming a motherless child,

yet throughout she cursed him in a whisper lest she wake the sleeping girl.

He heard her to the end, and then he slipped into her hand the money that he had taken from Philip Heyroun.

"I'll none of your chinks, you pestilent stringer!" said she.

"Go to with your folly!" he answered. "Pocket it up, and do you look well to Mistress Lovewell."

One last glance he cast toward the pallet, and then he squared his shoulders and stepped across the threshold. Without, a stone's cast from the hut, he saw that Wogan and a couple of his troopers were waiting to receive him.

CHAPTER XX

MERCY OF THE HEYROUNS

LATE that afternoon Jock passed for the third time in his life through the shadow of the gatehouse at Graystones, and though on those two former occasions he had come thither unwillingly, he held that he had come in a mood of cheerful anticipation, when compared to the mood that now was on him. This time he was trudging afoot, with his left wrist bound to Captain Wogan's saddlebow and Captain Wogan's troopers guarding him on either hand. From the bank of the Illey to the house of Graystones the march had been made in silence, and to Jock's well-grounded apprehensions silence was worse than any threat that Wogan could have uttered.

When the little squad drew rein at last in the court of the Graystones stable, Jock was moved to fervent thanksgiving by the sight of Lieutenant Phil Heyroun. Hitherto he had been quite indifferent to the Lieutenant's presence, but now he saw in him a more or less dispassionate outsider, and a man who had in latter days treated him with grudging civility, and, what was more important, a brother to Rafe Heyroun that had befriended him. Hopefully, then, as a man catches at a last straw of hope, he waited to see if the Lieutenant would speak a word concerning him, and he had not long to wait. Scarcely had Wogan reined in his tired horse and given a command for his men to dismount, when Lieutenant Phil was

out of the stable door where he had stood glooming, and halted at his captain's stirrup.

"So you've taken him!" said Phil, with a nod toward Jock, who perforce had halted when the horse had halted, and then, across the horse's neck, he addressed Jock directly: "You coney-catching rascal, if you'd had the gratitude of a mangy dog, you'd 'a' laid the matter open to my brother. He used you handsomely — the more fool he! You might 'a' told him of the will."

"Nay," said Wogan, with a grin, "in this matter Hetherington has run afore you, Phil. Already he has told me a deal about wills and so on. Look you, here's a key to the roof room which he swears he had of your cousin Philip Heyroun, but I judge that he had it from a kinder hand, though still from one that was of Heyroun blood. And he tells me, too, that your cousin Philip — on my word, he drives poor Philip hard in his inventions! — that Philip has concealed in his possession one of your missing wills."

"That, at least, is no invention of this scoundrel's," Lieutenant Phil interrupted. "This day, after you had ridden forth to seize the rogue, my cousin Jarvis — Philip's brother, mark you, kinsman to the whole forging, lying, perjured ging of them! — Jarvis found a will behind the wainscot in his chamber. That's Jarvis's tale — I would he were muzzled! Let them believe it who list. In any case, 'tis mine uncle's will, dated last February, and it gives all to my cousin Philip." As he stood, Lieutenant Phil began to tug and twist at the horse's mane. "I have looked upon the will. 'Tis a rank forgery, Lambert, it must be a forgery, — but even so it may work a heap of mischief. And so you had knowledge of it!" He wheeled again upon Jock. "You knew, and you did not tell us, you damned graceless mongrel!"

Jock moistened his lips, on the point of saying that it was only three days since he had wrung from the chestnut-haired

Philip his knowledge of this will, recovered by so miraculous a coincidence, but he thought better of it and stood mute. Where was the use of speaking? Whatever he said would merely be turned to his disadvantage. Once that day he had spoken, revealing the chestnut-haired Philip's share in his escape and his confession touching the will, even as he had sworn to do in the event of recapture. By such means he had hoped to hurt Philip, perhaps even to help himself a little, and he realized now that it was himself alone that had been hurt.

Wiser than Jock had reckoned him to be, the chestnut-haired Philip had discounted his story by himself producing the will in question, as soon as the recapture of the witness against him had become inevitable. He had been forced to discover the will in so crude a manner that he was burdened with an ugly suspicion, but there he touched the limit of the injury that it was in Jock's power to do him. If Philip chose to brazen the matter out, indifferent to the suspicions of his kinsmen, he was well beyond the reach of the law.

Meantime, for his sins, Jock realized that, by his own confession, he was himself now suspected to have known from the first about the hidden will, and to have kept silent until he had found himself in extremity. It was a crazed suspicion, quickly to be dissipated in the light of reason, but from old experience Jock held that Wogan and Lieutenant Phil, the one from hatred to him, the other from sheer addle-headedness, were alike incapable of shedding such a light on any subject pertaining to himself. So, after all, he could not feel much surprise or resentment when the Lieutenant cursed him for playing double, but he did sense a kind of humor in the fact that, thanks to the chestnut-haired Philip's skilful move, the man on whose interposition he had builded should prove as bitter against him as Wogan himself.

In silence, the only dignified course that was open to him,

Jock heard the Lieutenant to the end, and without a struggle suffered Wogan's men to handcuff him. At Wogan's bidding he followed then between two of the troopers, across the paved quadrangle of the stable-court, through chill passages where serving folk stood gaping in the doorways, and so into a dim little room that in the old days had been the buttery to the most ancient part of the house.

Before a stout door set in the wall Wogan bade halt, and was sending one of his men to fetch the key, when the door to the passage without was thrust open and the chestnut-haired Philip sauntered in. The light was not so dim but that Jock could observe, first, with unregenerate satisfaction, that Philip still bore the marks of his handiwork in the shape of a blackened eye and a cut lip, and second, with proportionate dismay, that Philip, as he looked upon him, was smiling never so slightly.

"So you've fetched back your promise-breaker, eh, Wogan?" said Philip. In his voice, defiantly confident, and in his carriage, wondrously erect for him, flaunted the outward signs of the consciousness that was his, that, if he were to rise victor from the desperate game that he had been forced to play, he must throughout cast his dice masterfully. Like a master he handed Wogan the key to the door. "In the service of the Parliament," said he, "you are free of this house at all times, Captain, even as you were when others, nearer akin to you, had good hope to play the great sir here."

Wogan's reply, as he fitted the key to the lock, was but half articulate, and the little that was audible rang ungraciously to the effect that Philip could not well help himself, if the loyal servants of the Parliament chose to seek their quarters under the roof that he called his. In an evil temper, manifestly, toward all the world, he ended his speech by crashing open the door and revealing a steep flight of stone

stairs that descended into blackness. "Get you down, Hetherington!" he bade. "And if you don't find your quarters to your liking, lay it to heart that you should not have tried this second escape. Repetitions are wearisome, remember, and oftentimes unadvisable."

At the words Philip snickered, with a hateful uptwist of the lips, and for an instant Jock saw the walls and the floor and the grinning faces of those about him sicklied over with the hue of scarlet. Between Philip who had betrayed him, and Wogan who had waited five weeks to taunt him with that stale form of words, he had little choice. To set his hands and his teeth to the throat of either man would have been comfort, but it was comfort that he knew was not for him. With dogged effort he blinked the mad scarlet from before his eyes, and giving those that watched the gratification of seeing him hesitate but a single minute, went at a good martial step toward the door of his prison.

As he crossed the threshold he felt the damp of the stairway grave-cold upon his face, and he caught the heavy, earthy scent of a pent-up and sunless spot. Round him the light faded as he went down the stairs, and with all his heart he prayed that he might not stumble in the dimness while those above, as he was conscious, stood and watched him from the stairhead. Then he was freed of that fear, at least, for he heard the door slammed, locked, and bolted behind him, and in the pitchy dark he leaned against the wall of the stairway and gave thanks for the poor boon of being left alone.

After what seemed to him a long space in which he was conscious only of darkness and harrowing cold, he took note of a gray light, if lesser darkness may be so termed, that gloomed at the foot of the stairs. Thither he stumbled, groping his manacled hands along the oozy wall, until he reached the cellar bottom, and then, as he grew accustomed

to the almost total blackness, he made a survey of his prison. It was the cellar beneath the oldest portion of the house in which he found himself. The only light came from a narrow, grated window that was set deep in masonry at the joining of the wall with the roof, and through this window could be seen a few spears of grass. Evidently the cellar was sunk a good ten feet below the level of the ground. The walls were clammy to the touch, the floor was damp as if with hidden springs, and for cold and darkness the place would have vied with any dungeon.

When he had made this not too comforting survey, Jock sat down on the lowest stair and with such philosophy as he could muster reviewed his position. First of all, he gave over the hope of quick release. Manacled as he was, he had not the slightest chance of escape. There in the cellar he would have to stay until Wogan chose to invite him out, and of that he saw little prospect. He was doomed then, in all likelihood, to endure for some hours, even for some days, the torments of cold and of darkness, and thereto, it might be, of hunger and thirst. Still, such punishment could not last forever. Surely, the discovery of the will and the resulting shift of affairs at Graystones would bring Rafe Heyroun post-haste from London.

"And he will help me," Jock whipped up his flagging courage. "He's a good fellow, and my life on't, he will stand my friend!"

While Jock reasoned thus, what little light was in the cellar faded, and in the thick darkness that closed round him he found it harder than ever to play the philosopher. He realized that he was shivering with cold, and when he rose and paced up and down to warm himself, he discovered that he was weary in every fibre, thanks to the hard march at Wogan's saddlebow, and thereto faint with hunger, and half choked with thirst. Moreover, now that he had leisure to brood

upon his own condition, he found that he had not done wisely in living the last days in drenched garments. His throat was sore, his head ached, and with the gloomiest foreboding he admitted that he was more than likely to complicate his already hazardous position by falling ill.

That night, or rather, a stretch of black hours that seemed longer than many nights, Jock spent crouched upon the stone stairs, as far as he could climb from the perishing chill of the cellar bottom. In the dark below he could hear the scurry and squeak of mice, and to such lullaby he slept by snatches, and woke stiff with his cramped position, chilled to the marrow, hot with growing fever, and tried to swallow and each time found that in the effort he suffered greater pain. Too wretched to sleep, he gave over the attempt at last, and sat staring into the dark, while he watched and prayed for the first gleam of dawn.

In the fainter darkness that in the cellar passed for the light of morning, came one of the troopers, Farrat, the Heronswood man, with whom aforetime Jock had had some speech in the Graystones stables. Lantern in hand, the trooper made his way down the stairs and set upon the lowest step a jug of water and a loaf of coarse bread. Moreover, after a prolonged stare at Jock, he cheered him with the gratuitous information that he was going sick. With martial brevity Jock assured him that he lied, but when he tried to drink the water, after Farrat had gone, he almost groaned aloud with the agony of swallowing, and as for the bread, he did not pretend to eat it, but forthwith flung it to the scrambling mice.

He found the day long and full of wretchedness, the more so as, in proportion as he sickened, he slacked his hold on the hope to which hitherto he had clung, — his solitary hope of Rafe Heyroun's interposition. With pitiless logic he told himself that now, when he was smirched with Blanche Mallory's

false charge and with the ugly-seeming circumstance of his stay with Althea upon Hendie's islet, he was surely cast out for all time from the favor of that occasional Puritan, Rafe Heyroun. If he had alienated Rafe by that hour in the barley field, he must inevitably by these later events, as they would be set forth, have driven him into the ranks of his active enemies.

At last the light faded from the cellar, and the darkness came and endured and gave place to light again, but Jock had lost count of the time and lost sense of everything, save of the pain that ploughed him from the root of his tongue to the depth of his chest. On the instinct of a sick animal he crept away from the stairs where men might come, and the window where the pale light struck through, and lay down in the farthest and darkest corner of the cellar. He must have drifted into sleep, though even in sleep he was conscious of cold and pain, and he woke startled as with nightmare by a sudden flare of light in his face.

Instinctively he swung up his hands to his eyes, and then he felt a grip on his wrist that forced his hands aside. Blinking, he looked up at Wogan, who bent over him, lantern in hand, and he found the sight tonic. In any other presence, except, perhaps, that of the chestnut-haired Philip, he might have collapsed and in his misery begged for succor. In this presence he sat stiffly, with clenched teeth, and waited.

Wogan straightened himself from his scrutiny of Jock's face. "I've no wish to be too hard on you," he said with swelling magnanimity. "It may be you have been disciplined enough for your breach of parole. You shall return to your old quarters, ay, and if you are not shamming, but are sick as you seem, you shall have proper tendance. In return I name but one condition: ere you come forth of this place, you must crave Mistress Mallory's pardon for the insult that you offered her."

Without strength to hold himself erect, Jock leaned against the wall behind him and looked up at Wogan. "Ask Blanche Mallory's pardon?" he repeated. "Confess to that of which she charges me?" and then, being in most cruel distress, added without thought of chivalry: "I'll see her in hell first!"

Wogan kept his temper so admirably that Jock realized that he must indeed seem ill. "You'll quit this cellar on no other condition," he patiently repeated his terms.

With the ghost of a laugh Jock answered, "If you hold me here much longer, I'll quit it in spite of your teeth — that is, unless you purpose to bury me here when I am dead."

This grewsome suggestion seemed to disturb Wogan far more than it disturbed Jock. "Come, come, you'd best hark to reason," he fairly urged.

In the midst of his urging, Jock gave him his final answer. "Tell Blanche Mallory," he said, "that I am her servant, Captain, in that, when you are wed to her, she will pay you all I owe you, and I owe you no small sum. And you, unless I misread you sorely, will pay her what I owe her. You have my blessing, Captain, but my apologies for a wrong I never meditated you will never have!"

He slid down again into his old position, where he lay with closed eyes, and after what seemed to him a long moment, he heard Wogan's footsteps recede and die away upon the staircase.

After another lapse of sleep and fevered dreams Jock opened his eyes again beneath the light of a lantern. It was Farrat this time, and, as Jock realized, he would never have come of his own initiative. He had fetched a blanket which he put round Jock, and then he offered good advice, learned by rote, anent the wisdom of Jock's doing whatever Captain Wogan bade. Jock lay with an arm across his eyes, and laughed light-headedly, as he read the meaning that lay beneath the words.

"Heaven save your brave captain's dignity!" he said. "Tell him from me he'll do no more by proxy than he did in person."

So Farrat went his way, and Jock lay, sweating and fever-racked, in the blanket, and listened to the scurry of the mice. By times he thought on the predicament of Wogan, who, in obvious fear lest he do to death Rafe Heyroun's witness, would fain have him safe out of the cellar, yet was too stubborn to remove the condition which in his foolishness he had made, and he found amusement in the thought. He was at the point where he was ready to laugh aloud at the plight of his arch-enemy, had he not been fearful lest, in laughing, he should inflict a new torture on his throat, when he thought to hear his name spoken aloud.

"Hetherington!"

He could have sworn that he had heard the word, but, half aware of the fever that was on him, he was ready to distrust his senses, until he heard his name spoken again in a breathless voice of fright. This time he knew that it was no delusion. Uncertainly he dragged himself to his feet, and groped his way across the cellar to a point beneath the narrow window. There, when he looked upward along the one pallid bar of light, he could see the few spears of grass and the smutty face of a little wench that he remembered to have met about the house.

"It was you that called me?" he asked, with a sense of disappointment that was the heavier because he scarcely knew what it was that he had dared to hope.

"So please you!" the girl hurried out her words. "I come from Mistress Althea. I am Dol, the scullery wench, sir. And oh! she is fain to know how it fares with you."

Blankly Jock stared up at the girl's smudged face. "Mistress Althea?" he repeated. "How comes it that she sent you? She is not here at Graystones?"

Dol, the scullery wench, nodded, catching her breath in a sob, and then snuffled: "They fetched her home this morn. Master Jarvis went unto her, and there was a great to-do, and she is locked into her chamber, and oh, sir, she is fain to know how it fares with you."

"Why," said Jock, "tell her not to fret herself for me. Tell her you had speech with me, and that you saw me well — and merry!"

For a moment he leaned against the wall and listened till he heard the little wench hurry away in the sunlight and free air above. Then he trudged back to his chosen dark corner, slowly but not stumbling so much as when he first had risen, and he wrapped the blanket close about him and disposed himself as comfortably as he could. Once again, to his salvation, he felt the impulse to fight resurge in him. They had broken faith with him; they had made captive his body that he had laid in pawn for Althea's safety, and now they had given her over to be shamed and ill treated by her kinswomen. No matter for that! he repeated savagely. He was alive, and he still would live to fight them all and succor her.

To that end, first of all, he would not let his body break under ill usage, nor his courage leave him in the dark and the loneliness where he was pent. Steady as he had not been in hours, he lay and thought of Althea, and somehow, half forgetful of cold and hunger, contrived to endure through another night and even, for one blessed hour, to snatch a little sleep.

In what Jock reckoned to be the morning of his third day's imprisonment, Farrat came again to bring him his rations and to proffer good advice, as to the wisdom of submitting to the Captain's conditions, but at the first words Jock laughed, in a fashion that made him retreat. Alone in the dull light, Jock glanced at the dish that was set within reach

of his hand, and concluded that Wogan must indeed be solicitous for his welfare, for this time they had not sent him bread and water, but hot meat from the Graystones kitchen. In the fighting mood that was on him, he resolved that presently he would eat the meat, every mouthful, and win back his strength, but for a time he delayed, only too well aware what pain it would cost him to swallow even one morsel. Lying with his head on his arm, he sniffed the savor of the food, all the time vowing that next moment he would rise and eat, and while he thus hesitated he grew aware of the dim shapes of mice that came creeping toward the dish.

At heart Jock dreaded to attempt to eat, and so it was that, in spite of his brave resolutions, he lay listless, and indifferently watched the swarming mice until he saw the great gray leader clamber to the edge of the dish and snatch forth a morsel. "Bravely done, lad!" Jock whispered, and though by putting forth his hand he could almost have touched the marauder, forbore to frighten it. Instead, he watched the mouse make its meal, telling himself the while that it was relishing the meat far more than he would have done, and he watched it when at last it turned tail to go back to its timorous fellows. To his thinking, it moved less nimbly than was the custom of such creatures, and then, as he watched it carelessly, he saw the mouse give a kind of quivering jump, run a few inches in a distracted half circle, and fall upon its side.

For the first whirling moments Jock was very steady. This was the mere fever work of his brain, he told himself, and he shut his eyes, confident that when he looked again he should find that the sight had vanished. He could feel the blood pulsing frantically in his temples, but he held his eyes shut while he counted twoscore, and then he looked, and there, as he last had seen it, lay the little dead mouse. With sudden violence he scrambled to his knees and snatched up the little

body. He found it real to the touch, a little, soft dead thing that had died eating of the meat that was meant for him.

With a sharp cry that startled his own ears and made a hideous echoing in that place of darkness, Jock hurled the dead thing from him, and in the same gesture dropped down with his face hidden in his manacled hands. For one instant still he fought blindly to regain his courage, and then, with a horrible sense of perishing, he felt himself beaten under by the black waves of panic terror.

How he had come thither he could not tell, but he found himself staggering up the staircase, and he heard his voice, strained and altered, that now cursed, and now prayed aloud. Behind him was stark horror and darkness that swarmed with shapes of fear. Before him, somewhere, was a door on which he meant to beat and to cry aloud, begging them as there was a God, as there was pity in the hearts of men, to let him out where there was light and human faces, to let him out, else he should go mad!

But when he reeled at last against the solid door and heard the iron of his handcuffs clang against the iron of the latch, he sensed the hopelessness of what he had set out to do. In that household, where in the ghastly semblance of compassion they had set poisoned meat before him, he could look to no man for mercy. With sudden yielding of all his tortured body, he dropped down on the step where he stood and crouched against the implacable door. Then, in the bitter dark, he heard a sound of strangled sobbing, and he knew that his hope was gone and his courage was broken and his spirit crushed within him, and without power even to feel resentment at that thought, he told himself that Wogan would be very glad.

CHAPTER XXI

DAY OF RECKONING

SOME four hours later as time is measured by the clock, an age later as it is measured by human suffering, the door of the cellar was thrown open, and Jock fell forward limply, head and shoulders on the floor without. He had remembered the old buttery as a place of dim light, but now he found himself so dazzled with the flood of crass brightness that he thrust up his hands to guard his eyes, and though he heard about him the voices of men, he could distinguish no more than the white blur of their faces.

Some one unlocked his handcuffs as he lay, and flung them clattering to the other side of the room. "What a plague!" stormed a voice that he knew for the voice of Lieutenant Phil. "Will you do to death a man that may be of use to us? It's well I had warning of your purpose, Lambert."

Jock sat up, because Lieutenant Phil caught him by the arm and neither strength nor spirit to resist was in him. He saw the Lieutenant bending over him, and beyond the Lieutenant stood Wogan, frowning, hands in pockets, and beside Wogan stood the chestnut-haired Philip. This time the chestnut-haired Philip was not smiling. His face was white and thin and eager, and his narrowed eyes no longer blinked.

"I warned you fairly!" Jock grew aware of the words that the chestnut-haired Philip was saying. "Lambert Wogan, I warned you fairly, and I'll bring witnesses thereto. I told

you the old cellar was a very bed of fever and of pestilence. 'Tis your blame if this man die."

"Die?" scoffed Lieutenant Phil. "Who talks of dying? You're worth a heap of dead men, eh, Hetherington?"

With his last remnant of stubborn strength Jock set his lips, for only too well he knew that if he opened them, he should beg aloud for mercy. Dumb and unresisting, he leaned against the wall where he sat, and knew himself beyond the point where he could even wonder what would befall him next. After a moment he was again aware of Lieutenant Phil bending over him, and Lieutenant Phil held a cup of wine and was trying to make him drink. To eat or drink what came from the house of Graystones was now to Jock a sheer nightmare of horror. With an upthrust of the elbow he sent the cup flying, and in the same movement caught the Lieutenant's arm.

"Take me hence!" he choked. "For the love of God, take me out of this house!"

The eyes of the two men met, and for once in his life Lieutenant Phil, already suspicious, and with his own interests involved, contrived to grasp an idea with tolerable quickness. Still bending over Jock, he spoke to Wogan: "Come, Lambert, don't stand too stiffly upon the condition that you named. Let the poor rascal go free of the cellar now. Until Rafe comes, I'll keep him in my custody, there at Heronswood —"

Wogan had remained obdurately silent, but as the Lieutenant unfolded his purpose, the chestnut-haired Philip interposed. "God's death, no!" he cried with startling vehemence. "Wogan! You'll never consent to such folly? You'll not let this treacherous hound cozen you and so escape again? Lock him down into the cellar, I say!"

Next instant the smouldering warfare between the two Philips was kindled, to Jock's good fortune, to a furious blaze.

"Ay, into the cellar that you just swore was a bed of fever!" mocked Lieutenant Phil. "Belike, sir, 'tis your bent to slay this man?"

The Lieutenant flung out the words, a mere rough taunt, to win a reply in kind, but what he won, most surprisingly, was first, a furious short exclamation from the chestnut-haired Philip, and then, from the same source, an open-handed blow that only missed his face because Wogan, interposing, caught the assailant's arm.

"Will you name me a murderer — a privy assassin?" raged the chestnut-haired Philip, as he struggled to free himself from Wogan's hold. "I've borne a deal from you and all your house, but this last I will not bear. Cousin, you shall fight me for this."

"Sneck up!" said Wogan, with all the contempt of a professional soldier for a noisy braggart. "You're no fighting man." He thrust the chestnut-haired Philip aside, and turning his back upon him, addressed his lieutenant: "Ay, Phil, you shall take Hetherington to your custody. I'll wager he's had that will cure him of any more attempting of escapes."

"But —" the chestnut-haired Philip began.

Across his shoulder Wogan bespoke Philip, briefly and to the point: "I know not what knavery you are hatching, you that have the knack to find papers behind wainscots, but I know that if you be so set to have Hetherington lie in the Graystones cellar, 'tis reason good for the friends of Rafe Heyroun to pack him off to Heronswood. Take him thither, Phil, ay, and see that you waste no time about it."

On this permission — a permission that well might be withdrawn, when Wogan's anger against the chestnut-haired Philip had cooled — Lieutenant Phil acted promptly. That same hour he took Jock, who for once in his life was civil, circumspect, and surprising quiet, and conveyed him to Heronswood village on a horse impressed from the Gray-

stones stable. At Heronswood there was no doctor at hand, so the Lieutenant, who was better versed in stable-lore than in physic, prescribed for Jock much the same drench that he would have prescribed for a sick colt. After he had seen him down it, a task that Jock accomplished, thanks to the fact that the basic elements of the draught were eggs and wine, the Lieutenant had him locked into the loft of the stable adjoining his own quarters, with a couple of blankets and a jug of water for his further comfort, and left him thus to work out his own cure.

In the loft Jock had at least a pile of hay, wherein he made himself a warm and comfortable bed, and in the stable below he could hear the movement and voices of men and the stamp of horses that cheered him with a sense of near companionship, and through the shutterless windows he could get clear air in plenty and by day the sunlight and at night the stars. After the Graystones cellar he found the loft a kind of paradise, and with all the will of his tough and wiry body he began to cast off the fever that was on him and to fight for his old strength. By the second evening of this, his latest captivity, he sat up and resolutely ate the bread and meat that was brought him, and when next morning he was told that he could come down into the stable, an he would, he came down, with a tolerably firm carriage.

But though Jock saw an excellent chance of soon recovering his bodily health, he knew at heart, and sickened at the knowledge, that he had lost something far more precious than mere strength of muscle. He winced to realize that Lieutenant Phil did not think it worth while to ask his parole, but contemptuously suffered him to lounge about the stable-yard, as if he knew him too spiritless to attempt escape, and he found still more bitter the realization that in this the Lieutenant had read him aright. Assuredly he would not try to escape; he would not, in any way, by deed, or word,

or even look, run the risk of offending Lieutenant Phil, whom up to that hour he had so despised, and thus challenging a return to Graystones and the dark cellar.

When he thought upon it closely, in the long leisure that now was his, Jock knew whom he had to thank for dealing him this last, most subtle, injury. There were many at Graystones that hated him, but chief of all were Wogan, and Blanche Mallory, and the chestnut-haired Philip, and of the three, to poison a man in the dark was not Lambert Wogan's way. Hating Wogan, and with good cause, Jock did him none the less the justice to acquit him of that charge. With equal certainty he felt that either Blanche or Philip, or the two in league, might well have taken this means to rid themselves of him, and of this suspicion he drew a damning confirmation from Philip's outbreak at the time of his release from the cellar.

"One day I will cry quits with him for that dish of meat!" Jock vowed, and then, in prompt reaction, scoffed at himself for a piteous braggart. If Philip should confront him at that moment, he knew that, lessoned by the Graystones cellar, he were far more likely to shrink from him than to face him boldly.

On the fourth morning of his stay at Heronswood, a Thursday, Jock dropped down the ladder from the loft to find the troopers on duty at the stable stirred to unwonted speech among themselves. From the very air he caught the sense of events impending, and he wondered, but held his tongue. Presently, as he stood in a little-used doorway at the rear of the stable, where he was listlessly watching some bedrabbled white ducks that were splashing in a miry pool, one of the men, too desirous of a listener to pick and choose, halted at his side.

"Praise God," said the trooper, "we'll soon be looking our last on this pestilent muddy country. To Hertford we go

now, and then where Heaven wills, though 'tis to be hoped we may bear a hand in the Lord's good work of chastising the accursed Irishry. We have our orders to march hence upon the Saturday."

Dully, Jock wondered how this withdrawal of the troops from Heronswood might affect him, but before he could bring himself to question his informant, a second trooper joined them in the doorway.

"Look you, Tom," the newcomer spoke to the first man, "this order means that our captain must wed in haste, or else bide a time."

Then, to all appearance, the pair forgot Jock, while, like a couple of village gossips, they discussed Captain Wogan's affairs. The second trooper, a cheerful rascal, who most mal-advisedly had been christened Resignation, had been in the habit of riding on Sundays to Barbroke, where a preacher of peculiarly edifying gifts held forth, so that he was able now to state with authority that the banns had been twice called between Lambert Wogan and Blanche Mallory, spinster. "And unless I misread Squire Wogan," he concluded with some heat, "he'll be married orderly and regular in Barbroke church like his fathers afore him, or not at all."

To this the trooper called Tom objected vigorously, saying that the Popish superstition of solemnizing a marriage in a church was now outworn among the elect and godly, of whose number surely was Captain Wogan. No doubt he would summon an independent clergyman from Clegden and make his marriage when and where it pleased him, and thus prove a shining example to waverers who looked back to Sodom, even as did Lot's foolish wife, he added, with pointed reference to the cheerful Resignation.

The argument, having now taken a theological turn, might have gone on indefinitely, but at that moment one of the lads that hung about the stable raised a cry that Captain Wogan

was just riding into the yard. Promptly the two disputants hastened about the tasks that in their zeal for controversy they had left undone, and in the midst of the slight confusion Jock swung himself up the ladder and withdrew to the depths of his loft.

It was not because he dreaded to meet Wogan that he had hurried away, Jock assured himself, and even in the assurance knew that he lied. The most that he could find courage to do, was to stand at the window and look down at Wogan, and as he stood thus, he fell to wondering what Wogan was thinking about the marriage that was now so near. Surely, a set mouth and a harassed scowl and a voice edged with irritation were not the tokens of a happily expectant bridegroom.

"He betrothed himself in haste," Jock reviewed the knowledge that he had gained from Althea. "He had the banns called at once, largely to contrary his kinswomen that did oppose, and now that he is like to be married, he finds he has a question, touching the gentlewoman, still unanswered."

For a little time Jock found comfort of a vengeful sort in musing on the snare in which his triumphant enemy was limed, but he lost hold on that comfort when that same day he was ordered to present himself at Lieutenant Heyroun's quarters. He went thither, steady of bearing, but at heart in terror lest he encounter Wogan. To his relief he found only Lieutenant Phil awaiting him, and from the Lieutenant, who was mindful of his brother's policy in like case, he received no harder commands than to shave and freshen himself as much as possible against the coming of those who should identify him.

"Rafe is minded to stay yet a time longer in London," said Phil, who lounged in a chair hard by while Jock was busied with the razors. "'Tis a rogue, that brother of mine! Never does he turn his back on Draycote but he makes pre-

text to bide away two months, though one would serve his turn as well. But Esdras Inchcome is a truepenny of another stamp. He will be here surely this day or the next. I sent him a message, haste-post-haste, so soon as my good cousin brought forward his forged will. We can trust Esdras Inchcome."

In the mood of nervous expectancy that was on him the Lieutenant seemed thankful to unburden himself to any one, even to Jock, and, emboldened by this outpouring of confidences, Jock at last ventured the question that he longed to have answered. "If it like you, Lieutenant, tell me, how came it to pass that you got news of the straits that I was in, there at Graystones?"

Lieutenant Phil stared, and then answered with a laugh that made Jock wish that he had left the question unasked. "Faith, you're wearing your aspects of innocence somewhat threadbare! Why, you rascal, I had a message from a kind friend of yours, my prim cousin Lovewell — if you do not feign to have forgot the name. She sent one of the serving wenches to tell me you were being done to death, and as I loved her, or as she loved you, or I know not what passionate form of words, I was to leap into the matter."

With that answer and the manner in which it was made to lay to heart, Jock went back to his loft. In the night hours when he lay wakeful he thought much of Althea, and he found a new, dull pain in the realization that in losing his courage he had lost his hope of aiding her. Almost he prayed that he might never see her again, to read in her eyes the knowledge that must be there that he had come back to her an altered and broken man, yet, against reason, for all the pain that in such a meeting he must suffer, he knew that at heart he longed to see her. So when, next morning, he was bidden mount and ride to Graystones, he made ready in a twofold mind, dreading to set foot again in the house that he shud-

dered only to remember, yet hoping that from afar he might set eyes upon the girl that he had loved.

As Jock was shortening the stirrup leather to his liking, in the moment while the squad that was detailed as escort waited for the word to ride, the trooper called Tom turned and spoke to him. "Come, sirrah," said Tom, "bear me witness that I said it. There's been a messenger sent unto Clegden to fetch that worthy independent clergyman, Mr. Dipworth. Even as I foretold, this will be the Captain's wedding-day."

"Don't ye be too sure!" said the trooper called Resignation, who obviously, in his time, had had ale and gossip with the wenches in the Graystones kitchen. "Did not the lad from Graystones that told of their sending to Clegden say also that the lawyer fellow was come back from London? Mark my word, where that old fox comes, some are like to be left in the suds."

There the discussion ended, for at that moment Lieutenant Phil came briskly from his quarters, and swung into his saddle. Straight for Graystones the little squad was headed at a round pace, for the Lieutenant, eager for the moment, now so near, when Esdras Inchcome should make all right, did not spare spur. Almost before Jock had time to realize what the next hour might hold for him, they were drawing rein in the paved court at Graystones, and through the open door of the stable he had a glimpse of Inchcome's hackney and of other horses that he did not recognize. Then he was following at the Lieutenant's heels across the great quadrangle and through chill passages, where he shivered, remembering to what he last had gone by that same road, and presently he stood in the old hall, that once before had been the scene of his trial.

With a feeling that all that had been done was now most drearily to be repeated, Jock looked about him, and he saw

Inchcome, precise and courteous, seated in his old place at the great table with a flagon of canary at his elbow, and he saw the chestnut-haired Philip standing on the hearth, and Wogan leaning restlessly on the back of a tall chair. But, as it had not been at the time of his first coming thither, Jock saw also, seated at the table, the man that once he had beaten, the Yorkshire-born lawyer, Symon Wastel, red of face and black of hair, and he saw Mistress Difficult, with a face of beaming triumph, and hard by her, with downcast eyes and hands that moved nervously upon her lap, he saw Mistress Mallory. He noted that she wore a silken gown of deep wine color, that he remembered to have seen before, and he wondered if she were arrayed against her wedding.

Then Inchcome, turning from the Lieutenant, curtly bade Jock be seated, and Jock, catching the glance of the chestnut-haired Philip, sat down on a bench by the door where he could keep his back against the wall, and with suspicious eyes he watched all that went on about him. Beneath Inchcome's hand, he noted, lay a formal parchment, and Lieutenant Phil too had noted the paper, and pointed to it with a contemptuous gesture.

"Have you looked upon that forgery, sir?" the Lieutenant questioned, and thereat Mistress Difficult sniffed aloud.

In answer Inchcome gave a leisurely glance about the room. "'Tis pity that Mr. Martin Heyroun is not here," he said. "You tell me that he has returned, and his good wife with him, into Essex, upon the finding of this document. And young Parson Jarvis, you say —"

"He has gone a-visiting to Cambridge," the parson's mother eagerly explained.

"Ah, yes!" said Inchcome. "And your niece, Mistress Lovewell, keeps her chamber, too ill to come among us."

Again Mistress Difficult sniffed.

"Well!" said Inchcome, and skilled though he was, let

sound in his voice a note of what was perilously akin to disappointment, "I have looked upon this parchment, even as you question me, Lieutenant Heyroun. It is in very truth the will that in the month of February of this same year I drew up for your deceased uncle, Philip Heyroun."

"I hope that he has won grace," said Mistress Difficult, aloud.

"Go on!" bade Lieutenant Phil, in a voice that was thick in his throat.

"By the provisions of this will," Inchcome continued in the same formal tone, "all female heirs of the deceased Philip receive a bequest of one shilling each, all male heirs ten shillings, save and excepting his beloved nephew Philip, son to his brother Benjamin deceased, to whom he leaves the entire estate, the said bequests excepted, whereof he dies possessed."

There was an instant of silence in which was audible the Lieutenant's sudden intake of breath, and then he rounded upon his chestnut-haired cousin. "There's another will," he said, gulping out the words, "the will that was drawn up in May — the will that you and your accomplice stole —"

"Who says I stole it?" cried the chestnut-haired Philip, in a voice that rose boldly to meet the other's passion.

The Lieutenant pointed to Jock, and the chestnut-haired Philip smiled, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I scarce need to give the lie to such a witness?" he said courteously to Inchcome.

With a familiar gesture, Inchcome shaded his eyes with his hand as he sat, and thus screened, glanced from the speaker to Jock, and back again. "Mr. Heyroun," said he, in a tone of gentle query that the sharp glance of his eyes belied, "who is that man sits yonder?"

In the hall two people, at least, waited as eagerly as did Jock for the forthcoming answer. Aware of their movements, even

in his own expectancy, Jock knew that Wogan had leaned a little forward and that Blanche Mallory had lifted her head and was staring with horrified eyes upon the speaker. For an instant the chestnut-haired Philip hesitated and then, baffled, as Jock suspected, in his honest purpose to have put the witness to his trickery underground, safe beyond reach of troublesome identification, he took the one bold course that was left him.

"That knave yonder?" Philip said with an easy nod in Jock's direction. "Why, he may be whom the devil pleases, but this I know, he is not that Captain Hetherington who was here in June, the one whom you are pleased to call my friend."

"You said —" began Lieutenant Phil, and stopped, cut short, as Wogan, for the first time, spoke a word.

"Then you must have lied," said Wogan, slowly, but it did not seem to be the chestnut-haired Philip at whom he flung the charge.

Unruffled, with a little smile, even, the chestnut-haired Philip surveyed the lowering faces that confronted him. "Sirs," said he, "I was mistaken in the fellow's identity on that first night, when I saw him unshaven and haggard. Now I do retract my harmless error, even, my good cousin Philip, as did your worthy mother, my Aunt Henrietta."

That word stopped the Lieutenant's mouth. Helpless, he swallowed in his throat and stood fidgeting with his sword hilt.

Meantime the Yorkshire man, Wastel, that was no friend to Jock, struck in: "You are scurvily served, Captain Wogan. That young ruffian sits yonder is not Squire Hetherington of Broxby. He's but a hangby of the family, the Parson's Jock, a penniless rogue from whom you'll get no ransom. Best ship him into Barbadoes and done with, I counsel you."

Wogan put up his hand with a sudden gesture that was

dignified. "Will you be silent?" he bade, and in that silence went to Blanche Mallory, and at his coming the girl seemed to shrink. "Mistress," said he, and took her hand and made her rise, "look once more upon that man yonder and tell me who he is. And you, sirrah!" he flung out at Jock, with a passion that made the girl beside him tremble. "Stand up!"

Jock stood up, and, shoulders to the wall, fronted Blanche Mallory across the width of the room, just as he had fronted her on that night six weeks before. On that night when she had lightly told the lie that was to be her stumbling block, she had smiled, radiant and unafraid, but now she did not smile, and her eyes were wide, and her lips were drawn thin. The chestnut-haired Philip might eat his lie if he would, with the cynical comfort that he could not be reached by law; for the thoughts of men he had no care, but she, who had striven solely for the regard of that one grim man beside her, had no such easy way of escape. Twice she moistened her lips and tried to speak and failed, sensing ruin, whether she held stoutly to her first story with Symon Wastel there in presence to deny her, or whether she retracted, when she must answer the inevitable second question: Why had she lied at the outset?

"Lambert!" she started to plead, with a quivering of the lips that once had moved him, but now the man that she had played with stood unmoved.

"Who is this fellow?" Wogan repeated, and then, at the limit of patience, with an involuntary gesture like that with which aforetime he twice had throttled Jock, he lifted his hand.

Blanche saw, and something within her understood. With a shriek of animal terror, she tore her hand from his and staggered back against the table. In her movement she over-set the flagon, and the wine, in a heavy stream, crawled across the table. "No, no!" she cried. "I am no wife of yours.

You have no right. Even though I lied. I shall never be wife of yours. Oh, I do thank God for that! I shall never be wife of yours!"

Amidst the outpouring of her hysteria that at last was genuine, Wogan wheeled upon Jock. "You, sir!" he raised his voice to be heard. "Give me now your story. What befell that day in the gallery — the day of my betrothal?"

Jock met Wogan's eyes, and mindful of much that he was owing to this man, laughed aloud, and saw Wogan wince at the sound. "Overlate for my story!" he cried above the girl's noisy sobbing. "Believe the gentlewoman, and God give you joy of her — you that were fain to batten on the meat that my cousin had mangled!"

With all his heart Jock had believed that Wogan would strike him down for the insult, but to his amazement Wogan stood quiet, and when he spoke, after a long minute, got out the words with heavy effort. "Phil!" said Wogan, "do you take him hence — Hetherington, I mean — out of my sight. For God's sake, take him hence! Let me never look upon him more."

On the threshold, as he followed the Lieutenant from the room, Jock cast a glance behind him. He saw the startled faces of the folk within the hall, and he saw Blanche Mallory, sobbing with her head sunk upon the table by which she crouched, and he saw Wogan standing, as if stricken, in the spot where he had been at last convinced of her trickery. Wogan's lips twitched and his eyes were set dully. The wine was dripping from the table, and the sticky pool, broadening upon the floor, had reached and stained the hem of the gown that Mistress Mallory had donned against her wedding.

CHAPTER XXII

THE BREAKING OF THE BRIDECAKE

FOR a half hour and more Jock had sat kicking his heels on a form in the old buttery. At his left hand was the door to the passage, fast bolted without, at his right the door to the cellar that he remembered, and glancing from one to the other, he was free to make such profitable deductions as he pleased. In the first moments he had given little heed to his own concerns, while with savage satisfaction he reviewed the happenings in the hall and dwelt on Wogan's stricken look, but as time passed and his blood cooled, he began to think uneasily of what was likely to befall him.

True, he was now acknowledged not to be Captain Hetherington, after six weeks of suffering in the Captain's stead, but he was still a friendless prisoner, and what was worse, a prisoner in the hands of the Heyrouns. With growing apprehension he glanced at the door to the cellar, and with growing uneasiness strained his ears for the welcome sound, in the passage without, of Lieutenant Phil's returning to release him.

Minute followed minute, and Jock had worked himself to a pitch of nervous terror like to that in which, earlier in the morning, he had entered the house, when at last he heard at his door the clatter of the bolt withdrawn. He started to his feet, hoping against hope to confront Lieutenant Phil or some one of the buff-coated men in whom, because they followed the

trade of arms, he had a little trust, and he felt his heart sink as he found himself face to face with one of the serving men of the household that was now the household of the chestnut-haired Philip.

"I'm sent to bring you into the hall. Please you to march," the fellow said insolently, and though Jock inwardly raged at that insolence, and raged at himself for submitting, he went quietly whither he was bidden. He was but one, and the household of Graystones was numerous, and the door to the cellar was very near, and those three facts, strive as he would, he could not banish from his mind.

Once again he found himself in the hall, and alert for danger, glanced furtively round him. The room that an hour before had rung with passionate clamor had now declined into a quiet that, to his suspicious mood, seemed still more hostile. At the table before him Inchcome sat alone, and with eyes cast down and face like a mask for impassivity, was tying up some papers, and by the hearth, in his old place, the sole remaining occupant of the hall, stood the chestnut-haired Philip. He kept his back toward Jock and to all appearance was absorbed in thrusting a charred brand into place with the toe of his boot, but from the set of his shoulders Jock knew that the man was aware of his coming and intent on all that passed.

Conscious always of Philip's lowering presence, Jock looked again toward Inchcome, as he heard him clear his throat to speak. At the old man's elbow stood a candle, lighted for the purpose of sealing the papers, and upon this candle Jock fixed his eyes. He held that the unnatural pale gleam of the flame against the daylight was a fit symbol of the unreality of the events among which he groped.

Said Inchcome, in his driest voice: "Sir, it has pleased Mr. Heyroun — Rafe Heyroun of Draycote — to do a mad and all uncalled-for deed that has my heartiest disapproval.

Against my counsel he has ransomed you from Captain Wogan."

Jock stared upon him, too crushed even to draw hope from an announcement that, a fortnight before, would have heaped the measure of his joy. While he stood silent, Inchcome went on, speaking with a bitterness that was, for the most part, foreign to his habit. Of a truth, and so Jock understood later, the old man was wearied with fruitless planning and long journeying, and sorely disappointed at the final turn of affairs, by which his dead friend's estate fell to that branch of the family to which he had least love. At that moment he could feel little kindness toward the world, and that mood of exasperation he naturally vented upon Jock, who stood ready to hand.

"You are deeply beholden to Mr. Heyroun," Inchcome told Jock, "yes, and to Captain Wogan, who set your ransom at a beggarly sum. In return 'tis understood that you give your promise never again to bear arms against the Parliament, and on that condition you are free to go your way — to the devil, if you be so minded!"

With a careless gesture that in itself was insult, he flicked a paper toward Jock, across the table. "As you might else be hindered on your way, here is a paper, signed by me as one of the Quorum, setting forth your identity to the best of my knowledge, and saying that you have been ransomed in due form and are returning homeward. Now take it and go, Hetherington — or whatever your name may be! — and I warn you fairly that if I find you loitering within my jurisdiction, I'll have you set in the stocks as a common vagabond."

With a noisy scrape Inchcome put back his chair and rose from table, and at that sound the chestnut-haired Philip turned from the fire. "And whither now, sir?" he asked.

"Home, to seek a night's rest," Inchcome spoke, and on the word passed out of the hall and closed the door behind him.

At the clang of the door that penned him in with the chestnut-haired poisoner, Jock came out of the daze into which, at the astounding news of his change of fortune, he had sunk. With a quick gesture he caught up the paper that had been flung him, and turned to follow the lawyer from the room, when he heard the voice that he had expected and dreaded to hear.

"Sit you down, Hetherington," said the chestnut-haired Philip, in his old assertive tone. "Before you quit this house I have a word to say to you. Sit down — unless you fear me!"

Jock had wheeled to face the speaker, ready to run or to fight, anything to make his way from that house, but at that well-chosen taunt he gave over his purpose. He was afraid to stay, yet at heart he was more afraid of betraying his fear. Nerving himself, he went to the table and sat down on the edge of a stool, face to Philip. Over and over he tried to hearten himself with the thought: "A little time ago I beat you, Master Philip, ay, and made you to cry aloud for mercy. Your friends have never brought me so low as I brought you, though they have been near it." But he found this boasting thought of slender profit. With alert eyes he watched Philip, and wondered, should Philip raise a hand against him, if he still had the courage to strike back.

Without sign of hostile purpose, Philip kept his place at the other side of the table, while he studied Jock with blinking eyes. "You claim to be a gentleman, do you not?" he asked abruptly.

"I am a gentleman," Jock answered in a tone that, for all his trying, did not match the defiance of the words.

"Then I make no doubt you are ready to deal honestly by

the girl that you have shamed. I speak of my unhappy kinswoman, Althea Lovewell."

Once before in his life, in Lieutenant Phil's quarters at Heronswood, Jock had heard the girl miscalled and had stood silent. He was not minded to bear himself thus a second time. In her behalf he strove for courage, and curiously, incomprehensibly, found that he had more spirit to champion her than he had mustered to defend himself.

"You choose your words ill in regard to that gentlewoman," he said slowly, but in a steadier voice. "By your own admission I am not Captain Hetherington, and by Mistress Mallory's bearing this day you may judge what credence to put in her testimony when she gave me to be a profligate ruffian. Because Mistress Lovewell was kept by stress of weather beneath the roof that sheltered me, is not sufficient reason for you to miscall her thus."

Philip smiled, his thin-lipped, hateful smile. "You will need use more than words to make your peace with that wretched child's kinsmen," he said.

There was that in Philip's tone that brought Jock to his feet. Very clearly he saw the pretext, under cover of which, with the sympathy of all men, Philip might work for his destruction, and by an impulse which he loathed, yet could not master, he made a step toward the door.

"Stand where you are," said Philip. "That fine, swashing Wogan and his men have left Graystones, but I've grooms and lackeys enough at my call, now I am master here, and I tell you plainly, sirrah, you go not out of this house till you right the girl."

"You will compel me to nothing," Jock answered, and for very hatred of the man before him, contrived to meet his eyes without shrinking.

To all appearance Philip was deceived by that mere husk of a courageous bearing, for he changed the burden of his

threat. "Lay this to heart also, you that were so gallant to champion the sweet gentlewoman, there upon the islet," he sneered. "An you go hence with my bidding left undone, 'twill be the worse for her that was your playfellow."

Jock halted then, nailed in his tracks. "What reparation do you require of me?" he asked.

Said Philip, "I require that here, in my presence, you shall marry that most unhappy girl."

In the blank silence that followed Jock looked at the unreal flicker of the pale candle flame, and brushed his hand across his eyes, and looked, and saw the flame still. He tried to think, not alone of himself, for whom he feared, like a coward, but of the girl, whose safety in some blind way seemed to hang upon his action, and he found that his thought was profitless. Enmeshed, choked in a coil of circumstance that he could not unravel, he made at last an unfamiliar gesture, as if he strove to put aside a tangible web.

"At least will you not suffer me speak with Mistress Lovewell?" he asked almost humbly, and Philip, after hesitating a moment as if he found the scene too pleasant to be unduly shortened, told him that in this he should have his will.

After Philip had gone away up the staircase, Jock went to the fire and, almost afraid of the loneliness of the great hall, sat himself down on the raised hearth, with his back against the masonry. Thus he sat staring into the room, too bewildered with the shift of events to think coherently, until he heard a lagging step upon the staircase. He raised his eyes and was aware of Althea, who, with head bent and arms that drooped forlornly, came slowly toward him across the echoing space.

For a moment Jock looked upon her almost as if he looked upon a stranger. He had remembered her as in the first days when he had seen her, self-reliant, almost challenging in the brusque freedom of her movements, with a face that in the

rounded outline of cheek and chin suggested a comely boy. Now, at the end of the ordeal, cruel for her as for him, he gazed upon a woman, timid of bearing with a hesitancy that cut his heart, and with a face worn to subtle, unsuspected loveliness of outline. He looked wondering, and then as, with an almost visible effort of will, she raised her head, he met her eyes, deepened, ensouled with suffering, but yet the same in their clear honesty. She had spoken no word, but her eyes spoke for her, pleading for his compassion, for his protection, and in that moment he felt his startled manhood strive to reaffirm itself.

While he looked upon her, half dazed with the heady sense of reviving courage and of that subtler feeling that the girl, in her new, woman presence stirred in him, Althea came, as of set purpose, and sank down on the seat against the wall, hard by the fire. "They have told you?" She spoke in a dull voice, with her eyes on her hands that rested lax, palm upward, on her lap.

Jock rose from his place on the hearth and knelt by her, with one arm laid along the seat beside her. "No matter for them," he said. "Forget them, Althea. This is Hendie's cottage ere they came, and I am saying now only that which I was fain to say then — and could not say."

In the full realization of the truth that he uttered, he was for a moment silent. To him it seemed a miracle that from hostile hands he should receive the crowning good. How often had he told himself that it were a madness, that it were a wrong and a shame to the girl, to tell her of the love that he, a penniless outcast, bore her. Now it was a duty laid upon him, his duty to take her to him and protect her, and with his heart at his lips he whispered the words that in dreams he had said to her, "I love you, Althea."

She did not raise her eyes. She did not stir her hand to meet his hand that sought hers. Only, "I pray you," she

said in a dull and weary voice, "be honest, Jock. You were ever honest, and for that I was your friend."

So well he knew her, that he knew she did not speak such words in coyness to draw him on. In sudden new fear he waited a blank moment before he hazarded the question: "Althea! Can you say that you do not believe that 'tis in honesty I speak when I pray you marry me?"

Of a sudden she put out her two hands to him, and let her eyes meet his. "You are kind — you have ever been kind!" she murmured, and then as suddenly she drew her hands from his hold, and clasping them about her knee, turned a little from him and so sat, half averted, with head bent. "If he but meant it! If I could know that he meant it!" the thought coursed through her brain, and with a bitterness that she had not felt under sneers and insults she cried out against her kinsfolk, who had blighted all that might have been between her and this man of her choice, who had set to her lips the cup that she had coveted, while with subtle cruelty they had turned the contents into gall.

When she spoke again, her voice was remote and edged with a hardness that was new to Jock. "You must understand — in honor I must give you to understand. It is because of Jarvis they would do this — my Aunt Difficult would do this. Jarvis is fain to marry me —"

"I know it well," said Jock, and in thought reverted to the time when, from his window, he had seen Althea and the young parson in the garden.

"He has long desired me," the girl went on, flinging forth the story as if she took savage pleasure in scourging herself with the repetition. "He learned where I was. Wogan told them — they were my kinsfolk — they were seeking for me. So Jarvis came to me, there on the islet. He seemed to think I should be glad now to be his wife." She choked a sudden sob and went on. "I hate him. I would die before I would

marry him — but his mother — she will not believe me. She says I lie — that I plot to marry him. She learned of his coming — she had them fetch me back to Graystones. I told her I would go away — I would go out to service — I would never see Jarvis if only she would let me go. But she would not suffer me. She is my kinswoman — one of my guardians — I am not yet eighteen. And she will not let me go hence until I go a married woman, beyond the reach of Jarvis. To secure me from him, they would marry me — marry me — anywhere — anyhow — to a beggar by the roadside — ”

She let the words slip, a mere wild generality, and only when she heard their sound knew what she had said. With a cry of pity, not for herself, she turned to him. “Oh, Jock!” she moaned. “I did not mean that last! I did not mean —”

“Nay, dear, I know!” he comforted, and tried to believe his own words.

But in the sorry silence that fell between them, he brooded on what she had said. Steadied in her presence to something like his former clearness of vision, he saw how mad had been the impulse on which he had knelt beside her. In the name of reason, why should this girl care for him — why should any girl care for a man without riches, without grace of manner or of person, whom she had always seen in captivity, outcast, browbeaten, humiliated? He felt his face burn with slow shame at his own effrontery, yet he dared not quit his place lest she think it was her words, not his own returning reason, drove him from her, and so chide herself. Abjectly, he sat where he had been kneeling, and with eyes downcast counted the slow ticking of the great clock in the far corner of the hall.

But as the miserable minutes ran on, slowly, little by little, Jock regripped his old practical habit of considering the immediate need. Not for his own sake, for he was beyond endeavor for himself, save the craven endeavor to keep alive,

but for the girl's sake, he struggled back to reasonable thought. By stealth he looked upon her, trying not to look with a lover's eyes, and he noted the faint hollows beneath her cheek bones, the waxy thinness of the fingers locked about her knee, and with that sight graven on his heart, he rose to his feet. He was not afraid and he knew what was to do. At his old horse-trooper's stride he went to the table and struck the bell that had been set for Inchcome's convenience, and then, with a disproportionate sense of satisfaction, he quenched the sickly flame of the candle.

He was standing in the sane and steady daylight, when the serving fellow that a little before had led him into the hall came in answer to the bell, and came grinning with familiar insolence. "Tell Mr. Heyroun I would speak with him," bade Jock, and the fellow cast back the sneer, "Master in the house, be ye, since ye've got you a mistress?"

It was no worse than many a speech that in the last days Jock had swallowed in silence, but now he knew that over his shoulder the words smote Althea. Without a pause to think on consequences and to fear, he took a step toward the serving man, and with one backhanded blow changed his grin to a bloody-lipped grimace. He heard the smacking sound of the blow that he had found courage to deliver, sweeter than music in his ears, and he spoke with his old note of authority, "Get about the business that I bade you!"

When he had seen the fellow go shuffling, cringing away, he turned, with the manner of recovered mastery upon him, to Althea, and took her two hands in his and drew her close. "You cannot stay in this house." He summarized the position swiftly. "They have near done you to death among them. You cannot leave, being under their guardianship, unless you go a married woman. So 'tis plain that you must marry me."

He met her eyes and, near in heart to her, vibrated to her

terror and her shame. "You need not fear," he blundered, almost roughly. "Whatever their crop-eared minister says, 'tis your word, not his, that makes me your husband at the last, and for that word of yours I will wait. You do me the grace to say that always I have been honest with you. Then believe me honest now."

So helpless, so dear she seemed, that he wanted but little of gathering her, then and there, into his arms, but for her sake, who must not be affrighted, he held himself in check. Perhaps in time he might win her to him; at that moment he must strive solely to win her to her own safety. To that end he found in himself the grace to lie valiantly. "Why," said he, "let us be reasonable, Althea. This marriage is but an expedient to help us both, remember, nothing more."

She looked at him, with eyes that seemed to reach his soul. "I trust you, Jock," she said slowly. "If you will, of your goodness — they shall call me your wife — you shall take me hence — and oh! from my heart I thank you, and I grieve that I can make you no return!"

At that moment, while their eyes met, he heard the sound of a door gently opened and of a soft footstep on the threshold. He knew that step, but he stood steady, back to the new-comer, face to Althea, and the hands with which he held her hands did not waver. "Whatever you owe me, you have more than paid back to me this hour," he said, in full realization of the debt of his recovered manhood that was due her, and then, still standing by her side, he turned and with unflinching eyes fronted the chestnut-haired Philip.

"Well?" said Philip, blinking.

"Mistress Lovewell is pleased to do me honor by becoming my wife," Jock answered. If Philip ventured on a sneer, he had resolved to strike him.

Possibly Philip read that determination in Jock's face, for he did not sneer. "Since that is your decision," he said,

"I have at hand a parson who came hither to solemnize this day a different marriage. He is an independent, and their rites are brief and of scant formality. I'll bid him in, and the marriage shall be made this hour."

"Ay," said Jock, "and call in your whole household, d'ye mind? You shall not spread your foul lies afterward, that we fled hence unwedded. Fetch hither all your people, I say!"

Jock had his will in this, even as he had looked to have it, for he had reckoned wisely that Philip and his mother, all the more set, in their sudden great fortune, to keep Jarvis from marrying a dowerless girl of tarnished repute, would for their own advantage do everything to make Althea's marriage fast and legal. One by one the household of Graystones, from the stableboys and kitchen wenches to the chestnut-haired Philip and his mother, Mistress Difficult, near a score of legal witnesses, gathered in the hall, and in the centre of that hostile circle Jock and Althea were made man and wife. The independent clergyman of Wogan's choosing would have used the barest of ceremonies, but Althea, at the last minute, drew a ring from her bosom and snapped it from the cord by which it hung about her neck.

"I will be married with this, my mother's ring," she said, with her old spirit, and she had her will.

When the last word was spoken, Jock took her in his arms and kissed her. He had not forgotten the folk that circled them about, rather, remembering but too well, he sought to give the girl comfort and to win for himself strength. With her kiss on his lips, he turned and among the faces — faces of women that tittered and of men that in the front rank scowled or in the safety of the rear rank sneered — he singled out the chestnut-haired Philip. "Now," — he flung the words like a challenge, — "I will take my wife hence."

Promptly Philip lifted a mocking voice. "Way there for Mr. Hetherington!"

The men shuffled back, nudging each other, grinning as they left a free pathway to the door, and one of the serving wenches giggled shrilly. In that moment, with the goodly applause of his dependents to hearten him, Philip stepped up to Jock with hand outstretched. "Hold!" said he. "Take your wife's inheritance with you."

It was a shilling piece that Philip proffered, and for a moment Jock was minded to dash the coin back into his face. But he came from the north, and with northern prudence he reflected that, now that he had the world to face, without money or friends and with a wife at his side, he were foolish to despise even a shilling. To the audible delight of the household of Graystones, he pocketed the coin. "I thank you, kinsman," he said. "On my word, I shall return later unto Graystones to tell you how deeply I thank you for this — and for another matter that you bear in mind."

The serving folk, still following their cue, laughed, but Philip, eye to eye with Jock, did not laugh. He went back a step and stood biting his thin lips, while Jock put his arm about Althea and between the lines of snickering servants led her from the hall.

Outside the house, on a common impulse to shake the dust of Graystones from their feet, Jock and Althea made their way across the courtyard, and passing beneath the old gatehouse, reached the lane that led to Heronswood. In silence they turned to the right and skirted the hedge that bounded the lands of the Heyrouns, till they had passed the great stables and the paddock. Then it was that, safe outside of the demesne of Graystones, Althea, so steady and so brave while her enemies looked upon her, sat down on the turf by the wayside, and resting her head upon her knees, sobbed and sobbed, while Jock, in utter helplessness, stood looking on. Once he bent, with a muttered word of comfort, and started to put his arm about her, but she shrank from him,

"No, no!" she choked. "Oh, I did ill to consent! Oh, in very truth I would that I were dead!"

At that moment both caught the sound, in the paddock, of running feet that drew quickly near. Straightway Althea dried her eyes, striving to find a face of defiance to show to her kindred, and Jock turned alertly to a gap in the hedge, hard at hand, through which danger might come. Next instant they both could have laughed at their fears, for through the gap there came no more than the breathless little scullery wench called Dol.

"Here is your cloak, Mistress Althea," she panted, "and sure I wish ye Godspeed, and long life and happiness, though I durst not say it yonder in the hall, and here, mistress, I have fetched ye a cake of mine own baking that ye might have a bridecake, else surely ye would never be rightly married, and I must speed back ere they miss me!"

Abruptly as she had come, the little maid whisked away through the hedge, and Althea was left staring at a small and steaming spicecake that rested on her lap. She began to laugh, an echo of her old laughter, though the tears were still wet upon her cheeks.

"Bless her kind heart!" she said. "But, Jock, whatever shall we do with this luckless cake?"

He knelt on the ground beside her, and taking the little cake, broke it in halves. "Why, eat it, dear lass!" he said. "Eat it, for luck!"

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CHAPTER XXIII

AT THE EBB

IN this, at least, the scullery wench's gift brought luck, that, in the homely act of eating hot spicecake, Jock and Althea must needs slacken something of the tragic tension with which they had quitted Graystones. The boy, by old practical habit, was first to fall to consideration of ways and means, and promptly, while he ate, he spoke of them. Had Althea, in this emergency, any kindred, any friends to whom he might conduct her, he questioned, and with secret joy of which he felt that he should be ashamed, he found that she had none.

"I have no friends in Sussex," she said, "else, you may be sure, I had never come to accept my Uncle Philip's charity. And of my Heyroun kin, my Aunt Henrietta showed me favor by times, but 'twas done only to spite my Aunt Difficult. She would cry out upon me now, and bar her door against me."

"She'll look for that chance till she's blind with looking," Jock rounded the sentence. "But what of the folk at Draycote?"

"Isabel sent me forth of her house," Althea said quietly.

"Yes," said Jock, "and I am already too deep in Rafe Heyroun's debt to go thither as if I looked to win further favor. We'll e'en fend for ourselves now, and owe thanks to no man."

It was a pretty declaration, but Althea, grown practical in her turn, reduced it to mere high sound. "And whither shall we go first?" she asked, as she ate the last of the cake-crumbs.

Jock whistled and then smiled, as it was, on the whole, a better thing to do and as cheap as to scowl. Said he: "I've a stepdame and fourteen half and quarter brothers and sisters in Daske Forest, and I've never a friend to count on nearer than there. Shall we trudge thither?"

At a certain point of desperation matters become amusing, and Althea, having reached that point, smiled in answer. "How far is that, Jock?" she asked. "Several counties distant, is it not?"

"A matter of nine counties," he answered lightly, "and something less than two hundred mile."

"That would be a journey of at least a fortnight," she commented, "and — what store of money have we, Jock?"

An exhaustive search revealed the fact that Althea had in her pocket a silver sixpence, and Jock had two pennies, which had slipped through a hole in the lining of his doublet, so that he had failed to find and give them to Mother Hendie. Besides this hoard, they had the shilling of Philip's contemptuous bestowal, which showed large and imposing against the copper pence and the shrivelled sixpence. "'Tis a rare thing to be an heiress!" quoth Jock, and Althea laughed, though instantly her face clouded again.

Truly, it was not a pleasant prospect for two friendless folk, — a journey of two hundred miles on a capital of one and eight pence, — but it seemed the only thing for them to do. Alike descendants of the Lancashire Holcrofts, they wasted no time in unpractical self-pity, but having eaten their bridecake, rose up and started courageously upon their journey.

With sound good sense Jock shaped their course through

field-paths and byways. He had a suspicion that his true identity had not been proclaimed through the countryside and that, bearing the odium of Captain Hetherington, he might suffer at the hands of the country folk the rough treatment that the Captain had well merited. At need he could fight, — and that he once more could say that of himself, he gave humble thanks to Heaven and to Althea! — but he was no pick-quarrel, especially when he had heavy odds against him, and he was weaponless. He regretted in special his lack of weapons and presently contrived to break him a cudgel in the roadside thicket, a poor substitute for a sword, yet better than nothing.

That night the newly-wedded pair spent in the shelter of a straw-stack, some six miles to the west of Heronswood. The air was edged with the frosts of mid-October and the evening wind was keen, but Jock burrowed a deep hollow in the straw for Althea's comfort, and when once he had seen that she slept, tired out with their march, slipped off his doublet and spread it over her. He trusted that now she would not suffer with the cold, and for himself, as he had done the most of his life, he suffered in silence. A part of the night he tramped up and down the bare, gusty field, swinging his arms to warm himself, and when he grew tired of marching he huddled down in the lee of the stack. Too cold to sleep, he sat wide-eyed and watched the stars, luminous with frost, that wheeled above him — Charles's Wain on the sparsely gemmed northern horizon, the sharp point of the Polar star, the streaming banner of the Milky Way.

"This is my marriage night," he reflected, and in the grim contrast of the reality with what his fancy had aforetime painted, found humor of a sort.

In the chill dawning Jock and Althea took up, each courageously, for the other's comfort, the course of life to which for several days they held. Each day they walked as far as

Althea's strength would endure. At night they slept, now beneath a hedge, now in the shelter of a deserted barn, once upon the fresh hay of a stable, where Jock groomed horses in the morning and so earned new milk to Althea's breakfast. With their little money, eked out to gain the worth of every penny, they bought bread, and shamelessly Jock foraged by night and with the skill born of old experience "found," as he phrased it, late apples and even raw turnips to piece out their scant fare. To all outward seeming their life was as poor, as hopeless, as degraded, as life could be and yet be life. With the practical sense in outward things on which he prided himself, Jock knew this as well as any chance onlooker that stared and scoffed at them as they trudged by his door, yet for all that, in the soul of him, perversely, against his reason, he knew himself at peace, nay, even well content.

For one great boon, he found himself each moment strong of hand and quick of thought, as, in the shaken state in which he had left the Graystones cellar, he had scarcely hoped to be again. For a greater boon, he found himself of service to the girl of his love, and in return he had all payment, — except the payment that he had pledged himself in honor not to ask, — payment of her presence, of the trust in her eyes when she looked upon him, of the sweet and patient courage with which, somewhat for his sake, he felt, she met all discomfort.

Of the girl's own heart, what can be said? Bittersweet hours those were to her, both in the living of them and in after-recollection. She was fain of the lad's company, yet loath to burden him, proud that she bore the name of his wife, yet shamed to think of the pity in which, she held, that name had been bestowed, jealous of each spent moment that brought so much nearer the time of their parting, yet, in mere justice to him, praying for that parting time to come.

Thus they trudged on through the autumn fields and the

dusty roads, outwardly a scorn and a laughing stock, inwardly living to each other a life where the sweet outweighed the bitter, till at last, a week from their setting forth, came a day when the external was forced upon them crushingly and their fools' paradise had an end.

It had been a day of lowering gray clouds that rested blanket-wise upon the hills, and with nightfall came a flurry of spiteful rain. On the gray horizon the wayfarers spied neither stack nor shelter of any kind, and in search of harborage they trudged on till they found themselves overtaken by the dark of the rain-harried evening. Little by little, in the last hours, Jock had felt his hardihood desert him, so that now he went in glum silence. In his pockets, where he had thrust his hands for warmth, he counted his money by touch and found that he stood possessed of sixpence. They had spent more than two-thirds of their stock, they had not come sixty miles upon their long journey, and he saw no chance to earn money to carry them farther. He had the strength of his arms and some skill with horses and cattle, but he could not look for employment in a Puritan county, where his step and carriage proclaimed him a soldier, and his wretched state gave him to be a soldier of the losing side.

In dumb misery he plodded forward with his face to the pelting rain, and he was wondering where and how this weary march would end, when he heard a little moan from Althea. As he turned to her, the girl sank down on the rain-soaked turf by the wayside. In the dark he could not see her face, but he read a tragic story of lost courage in the outline of her bent figure.

"What is amiss, sweetheart?" he coaxed, forgetting his compact in pity of her plight.

So near do tragedy and comedy touch shoulders that Althea laughed at her own answer. "'Tis a hole worn in my shoe, Jock. Indeed, my foot is blistered, and oh! I am so cold —

so cold!" Poor, plucky, little comrade, she let her courage go out in the sob with which she ended.

Regardless of his pledge, he took her into his arms, chafing her numbed hands, pressing her cold cheek to his. At first with joy he realized that she was relaxing, yielding without resistance, as if glad of his nearness, but next moment he read nothing but ill omen in this surrender. So well had he learned and loved the girl's essential reticence of person that he knew that only in bitter extremity, past heeding or caring for aught, would she have brooked his touch. Like a wild thing driven from its fastnesses by fire or by cold, she had come to his arms as the less of evils.

Presently, in the midst of her tears, Althea found the relief of words: "But it is madness — sheer madness! We cannot go on thus. You must surely see that we cannot. 'Tis as it was with us there upon the islet in the Illey. Alone, you might have gone on to safety then. With me claiming your care, we both came finally to Graystones. You must leave me, Jock, and go upon your way."

"Did I go on and leave you, there upon the islet?" he asked.

"It were better for you if you had," she answered wearily. Too tired even for tears, she rested in his arms, too tired even to utter the lie that had been upon her lips, "It had been better for me!" Instead she pleaded, "'Twas an expedient, our marriage, you said it. Now that its purpose is done, now that I am free of Graystones, let me go my way." As she heard the words, uttered in her stoutest tone, she shivered with involuntary fear lest he obey them.

Jock merely laughed, as hearty a laugh as a man could muster while his teeth were chattering with cold. "My dear," said he, "'tis not the custom in the north whence I come for a man to leave his dog to starve by the wayside, let alone his wife."

At that word he felt her shrink from him, and gently he released his hold upon her, but he finished what he had to say. "You are mine, at least, to care for and to guard. Do not forget that, Althea, and speak no more of my deserting you. Somehow we shall win through this pass."

He spoke with enough confidence to revive a flicker of courage in the exhausted girl, but at heart he knew not whereof he spoke. All about him he saw the prospect dark, dark as the bleak night itself, and look where he would, he spied no loophole of escape. For the present, however, he saw the instant need of getting Althea under shelter. As if she had been a boy, he read a whole history of physical weariness and collapse, not mere feminine hysteria, behind her tears.

Coaxing her, laughing at her, he got her to her feet, and again they started forward. She went but lamely, footsore in her broken shoes, so that he half carried her. By now the rain had ceased, but the damp chill of it hung heavy in the air, and the sky was overcast, and the stars were hidden. In a nightmare of darkness and penetrating damp, Jock went forward, with the burden of the outworn girl sagging against his arm and shoulder, and at his heart a weight of dread that grew with each step till it was near to crushing him.

At long last he made out, through the blackness, the small, sharp lights of a village. "You shall have food, and a bed beneath a Christian roof," he promised Althea, and he realized that she must be far gone indeed, when he found that, instead of crying out, as was her custom, against such rash expenditure, she heard the proffer in silence.

In the village he sought out the one poor inn, and there he spent their last sixpence. That night, while Althea slept in the chamber above, he sat by the low fire in the kitchen, and cudgelled his brains for some way out. He could not sleep for thinking on their plight, but passed the long hours in beating himself, as it were, against a blank wall of circumstance.

It was not till daylight, when he was washing his face at the stable pump, that in the gossiping talk of a friendly hostler he caught a name that he remembered well, and that instant grasped in his hand the clew to escape for which he had prayed. A little later, when Althea came belowstairs, he met her with a hopefulness that was not all assumed.

Said he, "What an if we stop short of Daske Forest? Will you weep yourself blind for disappointment?"

She tried to smile, though her face was white and her eyes were heavy with weariness.

"Here in this house," he went on, "I've been reminded of a gentleman that was my friend, what time we lay in Colchester, and, I dare swear, was no mere carpet-friend. In any case, I'll test his kindness now. His name is called Verney Claybourne, and they tell me that he dwells at the manor of Claybourne, not twenty mile to the north of here."

Althea gave a weak little gasp. "Twenty mile? Oh, Jock!" She sank down on the nearest seat.

"We can walk that distance in two days," he hurried on in a stout voice. "Verney was taken prisoner, there at Colchester, but he was a man of substance and will have ransomed himself long since. And he will give us shelter and succor, else never let me trust man more!"

On such slender hope they set forth, breakfastless, on their twenty-mile walk to Claybourne. Of the thousand contingencies that might dash their hope, Althea was too merciful to question Jock, and he himself was set not to think. He strode along that day, chin up and fists clenched. Over and over he repeated, as if the words held a charm, that Verney must be there at Claybourne — he must — he must! It seemed to Jock as if, by the very force of his will oft expressed, he could compel fate itself.

By noon Althea was so faint with hunger that she could walk no farther. He left her beneath the hedge, and went

to a farmhouse, where all the afternoon he hewed wood and fetched water for a blackguardly churl. It was the very crucifixion of his pride, but he won in return a pocketful of stale bread. He went back to Althea, he persuaded her, almost by sheer strength of will, to eat a morsel, and then, with his help, to stumble forward a mile or two farther. There they spent the night, huddling for shelter beneath a bridge, and in the morning, when they had eaten the last of their bread, set forward again.

"We shall lie to-night at Claybourne," Jock said with dogged confidence.

Through that iron day of weariness that wore to the soul, he upheld himself, he upheld the girl, till the moment of consummation. Just as the sun was setting, they came in sight, above the hedgerows of the lane that they followed, of a square church tower in a bosage of yews, and the gables of a stone house. Almost tremulous in that instant of triumph, Jock climbed the stile that led over the hedge and helped Althea to a place on the step below him.

From the vantage-point of the stile he descried, in the field beyond, a laborer, a ditcher, who was just shouldering his spade ere he started homeward, and he hailed the fellow. "Yonder is Claybourne, friend?" He indicated the church tower, the gabled house, and the lower huddle of thatched roofs that showed above the hedges, two fields away.

"Ay, yon's Claybourne manor," said the man.

Jock wet his lips ere he ventured the next question. "Is Mr. Verney Claybourne at the manor house?"

"Young squire, is it?" the man questioned slowly. "Nay, he's not come home. If ye be minded to go a-begging," he added shrewdly, "best shog off from the manor house. Old dame, his mother, rules the roost while squire's away, and she's rare and angry that squire went roaming the country wi' the rakehelly king's men and had ransom to pay, and

seeing that you're a king's man, by the cut of you, she'll surely set the dogs 'on you."

The man jogged away through the dim field, and Jock and Althea remained sitting stupidly upon the stile. After a moment she dropped her head against his knee. He put his arm about her, and so they sat in silence, while round them the shadows deepened and the light faded out of the west.

"Come," he said at last in a lifeless voice. "We cannot sit here all night."

Without further words, they turned back up the lane that they had followed from the main highway. Althea limped, dragging herself along painfully, but she uttered no reproaches for the false hope that had been fostered in her, and dumbly Jock was thankful for this forbearance. Undecided, for once, he himself went but slowly, and soon, almost without settled plan, he turned from the beaten track into the barren common through which the way now led. Stumbling in the dim light, he trudged on until he came to a little hollow set round with furze bushes. There he sat down, and Althea sank beside him.

He looked at her bowed head and her drooping body beneath the shabby cloak. "I'm sorry!" he said in a dull voice.

She put out her hand to him. "Jock!" she said tremulously. "Will you kiss me — once?"

He drew her to him, and with her head upon his shoulder, she went on wearily: "I would thank you — for that you were kind. And I have been happy, mad though it sounds to say it — I have been very happy — at times — since we left Graystones. But I cannot walk farther. I think I shall die, Jock. And so 'twill be best for us both."

"No!" he cried. In an agony of fright he crushed her to him. "You shall not die, Althea. I cannot let you. I love you too well. In pity you must not leave me! Althea!

Althea! 'Tis only a little longer, sweet. Somehow we shall win through."

On his own ears the words rang hollow. He fell silent, struck dumb where he sat with arms locked about her. He felt her weight so light, so feeble in his hold, and he thought on what she had said. If she should leave him in the cold hours of the night that shut them round! If she should slip away from the vain arms that clasped her! "You shall not die!" he said, through clenched teeth, and, even in the saying, knew how impotent were the words.

It was at that moment that, far off on the pitch-black common, Jock grew aware of the thud of a horse's feet. With sudden clearness, as a man in extremity will sometimes note the paltriest of unessential things, he figured to himself what manner of man was riding yonder. A smug farmer, no doubt, bound home from market, perchance, with money in his pocket. Bitterly Jock envied him that money — the money that would buy food and warmth and life for Althea, and then, to the envy, succeeded a mood that was more dangerous.

Tense and nerved with desperate resolution, Jock rose to his feet. "Give me your kerchief, lass!" he bade.

"You cannot barter it for food," she answered listlessly, as she held it out to him.

"Ay, but I can!" he laughed. "Stay you here quietly, whatever happen!"

He snatched up his cudgel as he spoke, and at a swift, noiseless run started for the road. In the pitchy dark he lost some breathless moments ere he spied it, winding, a path of sheer blackness, through the dusky masses of the furze bushes, but the darkness was round the horseman too, and he came on but slowly. In ample time for his task Jock reached the roadside, where he crouched behind a furze bush. He knew that the darkness must hide his features, but as an added precaution he tied the kerchief across the lower part

of his face. Then he gripped his cudgel and waited, ready to spring, while he heard the hoofs thud nearer, nearer, and almost upon him saw the black bulk of horse and rider loom out of the dark.

At a bound Jock landed in the roadway and unerringly gripped the bridle, as the startled horse veered to one side. "Out with your purse, man, else I give fire!" he cried.

For answer he saw the rider's arm swing up above his head. Next instant he saw the inky sky shot with a million star points, he felt the earth go from beneath his feet, and whirling through an infinite emptiness, he landed with a jarring shock, and from that moment lost track of time and space.

CHAPTER XXIV

A VOICE FROM THE DARK

IN the depths where Jock lay, blind and dumb, with no sense left him save the muffled sense of hearing, he caught, faint and far off on the surface of things, as it were, the sound of men's voices.

"Who is the rascal?"

"A devil of this plaguy darkness! How can I see?"

"Stand still, ye villain!" This, a third voice, to the accompaniment of a horse's restless pawing.

"Where a' Heaven's name is his pistol?" the first voice began again.

"I know not, nor do I care. I have *him* fast."

Of this Jock was sensibly aware, for rousing slowly from his trance, he felt the heavy pressure of a hand at his throat and saw the dim outlines of a man that knelt above him. With a tantalized feeling that this had all happened afore-time, that, were his numbed brain able to work, he could link the present with the past, he lay and wondered.

"Where the vengeance can his pistol be?" the first voice once more grew plaintive.

"A question if he had one!" growled the man that held Jock.

"Then for Heaven's love, let him go," cried the third speaker, "for as impudent a courageous rogue as ever 'scaped hanging!"

Then it was that Jock, struggling as beneath a weight to

throw off the palsy of tongue and thought that bore upon him, heard another voice speak, clear and unafraid: "I do beseech you, sirs. This is my husband. In mercy let me come unto him."

At the sound of that voice Jock felt life stir in him again — would have felt it, he knew, had he lain six feet beneath the earth. He made an effort — an effort that racked all his body — and he succeeded in finding speech. "Althea!" he whispered, and again, "Althea!"

He knew that the hand that had gripped his throat was withdrawn, and next instant he felt himself drifting, rising through space, and found himself again, lying with his head upon the girl's lap. He felt her arms about him; felt her whole body bend sheltering above him, and heard the quick flutter of her breath.

"And who may you be, wench?"

The voice of the first speaker, the man that had been so solicitous about the pistol, was insolent. In the dark Jock could feel that he was drawing near. Afraid for Althea, he spurred his brain that groped about the chasm and with a tremendous endeavor bridged the gulf. "Verney!" he gasped. "Verney Claybourne!"

He could feel the presence of the man that had held him, who now was bending over him, close, as if by his mere closeness he would pierce the dark. "In the name of wonder! who are you?" came the voice that he knew for Verney's.

"Jock Hetherington," he whispered in answer. "And this my wife — my wife — be kind unto her."

He dropped down again, down and down into his old place of darkness and helplessness and pain. He heard about him a murmur of voices, and then the thud of a horse's hoofs fast dying away on the common. Murmur of voices still, once a dash of cold water in his face that made him groan, and a mouthful of spirits, forced between his teeth, that half choked

him. Always the girl's arms about him, her presence fending him, and for her sake he fought for consciousness, till the power to fight was no longer in him.

He roused once more in keen torture, to find himself laid upon straw in the bottom of a cart that jolted cruelly, and still the girl held his head, and realizing, he smothered the groan that rose to his lips. Once again, half conscious, he knew that there was candlelight about him and he hoped to see her face, but his eyes ached so in the light that he was fain to close them. But afterward, when he was lying in bed, he reached out his hand in perfect trust, and found her hand, and holding to it, slept.

He woke in the lazy daylight of high noon, sore-headed and cross in consequence. He was lying cosily in an unfamiliar bed, with his face to an unfamiliar wainscotted wall, and when he put up his hand, he found that his head was bandaged in an unfamiliar and annoying fashion. He turned himself and his head with infinite craft, and he saw the diamonds of sunlight, matching the diamond panes of the window, that lay upon the dark floor, and then, as he blinked the light from his eyes, he caught a gleam of color, not quite hidden by the heavy hangings of the bed.

"What's there?" he asked.

In answer Althea came from behind the curtain where she had been sitting and stood by the bedside. Her face was pale and her eyes were big, but her eyes were happy, and her lips smiled in a way that of late they had forgotten. She wore a gown of the color of ashes that showed, in the sunlight, gleams of dull rose, — an old-fashioned gown that gave a greater glimpse of her soft throat and white neck than ever her kerchief had permitted. She looked a little woman, a quaint, sweet, and most lovable little woman.

Jock caught her two hands as she held them out to him. "Well, Althea?" he asked. "It is well?"

"Surely, now that you are better," she answered, and smiled down at him with such a look in her eyes that he had good hope that she would, unasked, bend and kiss him, and was a little dashed in spirits when she did nothing of the sort.

"This is Claybourne manor," she went on, and in a sisterly fashion that was not what he desired sat herself on the edge of the bed. "Mr. Claybourne had you brought hither, and oh! that churl in the field maligned his mother shamefully, for she has been kinder almost than any woman I have ever known. She even lent me this gown. 'Tis one she wore when a girl."

"'Tis a pretty gown," said Jock. "And you are pretty in it!" he added.

She blushed, casting down her eyes, at this, the first silly little loverlike compliment that ever he had paid her. He watched her, wondering, hoping from her confusion, and then, in that moment of hesitancy, the door of the chamber was opened and on the threshold, most unwelcome at that juncture, appeared Verney Claybourne.

From a distance Verney smiled upon the pair, with much the same quality of amusement with which Jock himself would have viewed Rafe Heyroun's Phil and his little sister. "And how fares your — husband," he asked, "Mistress Hetherington?"

Althea colored still more deeply at the unwonted title, and rose, and releasing Jock's hand, with the least possible pressure, stole from the room and left him to his friend.

In the next half hour Jock became wiser by several pieces of information. He learned, first, that Verney had been on his way home the night before with Will Framlingham and Dick Tevery, whom he had bidden to his house. Jock read between the lines, though Verney did not say it in so many words, that the three gentlemen had paid their ransoms a fortnight ago, and since then had consoled themselves for the

failure of their cause by a period of glorious revelry at the house of Dick's kinsman in Bedfordshire. Second, he learned that Verney had been riding ahead of his friends, in search of the road which they had lost in the dark, and as he knew the common was a notorious place for padders, had carried his pistol in his hand.

"And you may thank the good luck of the Cavaliers," said Verney, "that I gave you the butt of the pistol instead of the barrel."

Jock looked rueful, and gingerly touched his aching head. "'Tis ill enough to content me as 'tis," he muttered.

"And to content me," rejoined Verney, with some grimness. "I 'scaped your temple by the width of a hair, and you'll have a brave scar on the forehead will bear you company to your grave — if ever you lie decently in a grave," he amended. "You're like to swing in chains if you get the habit of going the gait you went last night. The stark impudence of you to bid me stand and deliver, and you with no pistol and scarce the strength to keep steady on your two legs!"

A prudent harping on this theme of the general madness of his behavior, reduced Jock to a state of such abject humility that he acquiesced in Verney's third piece of information: namely, that he and his wife — in his own despite Verney still smiled at the idea of Jock's having a wife — were to rest safe at Claybourne manor until such time as he was fully recovered, and as long thereafter as they might be pleased to stay.

With his mind at rest as to the needs of the immediate future, Jock made a quick recovery, in which he was retarded, rather than furthered, by the assiduous kindness of his three old comrades in arms and adversity. They talked and cross-questioned and chaffed him into a nervous bad temper, and then, vowing his ill humor a good sign of convalescence, they cheerfully, after the manner of their kind, left him to

the forbearance of the women, while they went about their own business or pleasure.

As a result, Jock made the acquaintance of Mistress Claybourne, a mild, small old gentlewoman when viewed at a distance, but when viewed closer, blessed with a pair of snapping black eyes and a determined chin that lent plausibility to the ditcher's hint as to her character. In her dealings with her son Verney she reminded Jock of a small black Spanish hen, trying to mother a large and self-willed duck of her own eternally surprised hatching. But she was kind to Althea, who, by some whimsical stroke of fortune, had won her heart, and she was tolerant of Jock, whom she seemed to hold by virtue of his married state to be the least disreputable of her son's three friends. Somewhat in return for her kindness, somewhat because he was a little afraid of her, Jock was resolutely good tempered and meek — almost civil and circumspect, in short — in Mistress Claybourne's presence.

With Althea, as a matter of course, he bridled his temper and stifled what complaints were likely, between pain and weariness, to be wrung from him. He would do nothing that would give her pretext to leave him, so eager was he for every least minute of her companionship. He said little to her in those hours of his convalescence, since, by his own pledge, he was bound to say nothing of what he desired to say, but he watched her hungrily. She had a favorite corner on the broad window seat, where the sunlight fell upon her hair and her hands, and there she would sit by the hour, hemming linen for Mistress Claybourne or reading aloud from a brown book with clasps, of which he never even asked the title or guessed the contents, or perhaps singing a snatch of tune, more to herself than to him. If he spoke, she was ready always, eager and alert to fetch and carry, to be of any service to him. If she had been his own sister, he reflected bitterly, she could not have been kinder or more considerate.

At times he wondered if, by any chance, he had dreamed some passages of their pilgrimage that were graven on his mind, and one afternoon, goaded by her calm self-control, he probed the place brutally. "This is a snugger haven than we looked to have that last night, when we sat under the furze bushes there on Claybourne common," he spoke out of a sudden.

She nodded, bending her face lower above her sewing.

"Do you remember that night?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered not quite steadily. "I was cruelly cold and wearied, and almost giddy-headed for lack of food. Indeed, I was not myself that night. I pray you, Jock, believe that."

She turned away her face as she spoke, but from the wavering tone of her voice he could have sworn that she was near to crying. With a request for a drink of water, he gave her good excuse to leave the room, and when she once was gone he buried his face in his arms. What a churl he had been! Poor, little, friendless lass, cold, and hungry, and wearied, who had clung to him for comfort and for sympathy, and he had sought to misconstrue that human longing of hers into a declaration of love! From head to foot he tingled with the shame of the realization. When he heard her reënter the room, he lay quiet, and as a penance feigned to be asleep so that she went away and left him.

From that hour he found the girl's friendly presence less of a comfort, more of a torture to him. Spurred by the desire to end a phase of intimacy that must be as hard, in its different way, for her as for him, he declared that he was well again, and in any case, was weary of sick-room imprisonment. So importunate was he that presently, with a white face and a bandaged head, he was up and lagging about the house and the stable. He won a boisterous welcome from Tevery and Framlingham, who still lingered at the manor house, to the

disrelish of its mistress, and straightway he fell to planning with them for his next step.

In sequel, he sought out Althea one morning for a practical talk. He found her alone in the hall, half hidden in a vast apron and busied in polishing a precious silver flagon which Mistress Claybourne had hitherto suffered none but herself to handle. She sat back to him, and he noted that she started at the sound of his step and held herself with what he read as tense expectancy in every line of her body. Dully he wondered if she were afraid of him.

He sat himself upon a corner of the table near her. "I've been planning for us both, Althea," he said. He was careful, in these latter days, to use no terms of endearment that might offend her.

"And what plan have you hit upon?" she asked, intent on the flagon.

"You are to stay as long as it may please you with Mistress Claybourne. She has no daughters of her own, and she is very fain of your company. You will stay?"

She bowed her head. "Yes," she said, "and glad to. I have been very happy, here in this house," she added timidly, and then blushed red.

He thought she feared the misconstruction that he, proved once a self-sufficient coxcomb, might put upon her words, and he strove to set that fear at rest. "To be sure, you must have been happy," he said bluffly. "Mistress Claybourne has been most gracious to you."

He was so pleased with his own tactfulness that he lapsed into admiring silence, and it was Althea who resumed the conversation. "And meantime," said she, in a casual voice, while she kept her eyes on the flagon, "whither do you go, Jock?"

"To the Low Countries with Dick and Will," he answered. "By the terms of their parole they must leave England before

the first day of December. I go with them, back to my old trade, Althea. I hope to win me a commission and to speed well, and if I am so fortun'd, I shall return a year hence to Claybourne." He spoke with dogged determination, and he had it on the tip of his tongue to add in the same strain, "And then I shall woo you as if this accursed marriage that has botched all had never been between us, and if God is good, mayhap I shall win you."

But he did not say the words. Empty-handed as he was, he held that he had no right to make himself a wooer, even of the girl that was his wife in name. He half hoped that she might make some outcry at his going, but she polished the flagon in silence, so he paid her a compliment, half laughing, for a notable thrifty housewife, and turned to the door.

On the threshold her voice stayed him. "And when do you purpose to go upon this journey, Jock?"

"Day after to-morrow we look to ride," he answered, and not daring to glance at her, lest he find her rejoiced at the nearness of his departure, went away.

That evening the silver flagon, albeit of Mistress Claybourne's best and bright with Althea's patient polishing, was mercilessly requisitioned. The day, as it chanced, was the fifth of November, a date of baffled treason that it behooved all loyal gentlemen to celebrate with deep drinking, and moreover, it was the first evening that Jock, still in a white state of convalescence, had consented to touch wine. Hence the flagon, gleaming under the candlelight, and a generous store of sherris and Alicant, and four loyal gentlemen gathered round the table in the hall at Claybourne manor house.

With doors discreetly closed upon the serving folk, and shutters discreetly fastened, they drank the king's health on their knees, and they drank confusion to his enemies, standing, hand on sword. By a natural transition, when they were in their seats again, they fell to discussing that portion

of the king's enemies that had held them captive at Colchester, and all the varying fortunes of war, tragic at the time, but now grown laughable.

Then it was that Verney spoke, soberly, but with a twinkle in his eyes, "Jock, I'll give you the best horse in my stable for a complete and veracious account of all that befell you from the time you left St. Andrew's."

So many times and so untactfully had Jock been urged to disclosure by his friends that it were doubtful now if even hot pincers could have wrung from him the desired information. "I've naught to tell," he said shortly. "I went in Captain Hetherington's stead to a house called Graystones whence I took my wife. And I left there three gentlemen with whom I hope to have further speech — one Captain Wogan of the Parliament army, one Philip Heyroun, master of Graystones, and one Esdras Inchcome, a lawyer of Bury St. Edmund's."

Verney gave a shout. "Inchcome, do you say? Esdras Inchcome? Why, Jock, 'tis on my preserves that you are poaching now. The man is my lawyer, and my father's before me. A little, sly, gray devil, but staunch timber. 'Twas he that handled the business of my ransom."

Jock looked upon the speaker, and then struck his forehead with a gesture as if he would fain have boxed his own ears. "So you were the Cambridgeshire client!" he cried. "A plague upon Inchcome that he never spoke your name, and a plague catch me for a fool that I never asked it! I'd have saved myself a mort of trouble, could I have called on you to vouch for me."

Then, because it was of little use to cry over milk that was spilt, Jock laughed. "Faith, Verney," he said, "for your sake I'll forgive Inchcome all that I owe him, but for the other brace of gentlemen that I met at Graystones —"

"Curse yourself," advised Tevery, "that you took another man's name and thrust into his danger."

Said Jock, "I'd liefer curse that other man."

Tevery laughed and Framlingham joined in. Warm, lazy, well content, in their brief harborage ere they launched out again into the storm they loved, the two soldiers of fortune were bound to find merriment that night in all things. But Claybourne, bred to gentler thinking in the old Cambridge-shire manor house, frowned never so slightly.

"Jock," he said, "your cousin, Captain Hetherington, died that night after you were taken from St. Andrew's. And ere he died he spoke of you, and he spoke kindly."

Jock looked at the speaker, with level gray eyes beneath the white bandage that was about his forehead. "Is it so?" he said unmoved. "Then he must have been in mad delirium."

"At times, yes," answered Verney. He gazed beyond Jock, seeing again the bare walls and the flagstones of St. Andrew's, the sparse streaks of lantern light athwart the dark, and the face of the dying man — the worn, wicked, older face, that yet bore in it so much of Jock's look. "Still, at moments," Verney resumed, "Captain Hetherington was himself and he knew, albe 'twas through mistake of yours, that you had avenged him upon the man Pedock. He spoke of you. He called you a cursed little ruffian, and then he muttered something of atonement — atonement for the dog."

Jock caught breath. "He said that — my cousin said that? Then he remembered my dog that he slew?"

"A droll thing for a man to bring to mind upon his death-bed," murmured Framlingham.

"I do not hold it so," said Jock.

He turned a little from his comrades and sat with eyes downbent. So his cousin had remembered — at the last he had remembered, as Jock, with a child's bursting heart, with a boy's settled hate, had prayed that he might remember at

his passing hour. Slowly he felt his grudge against his kinsman die. If the man had remembered, so poignantly that that scene of long ago had flashed before his dying eyes, that, perhaps, were punishment enough. In whatever dark place that dark soul now strayed, Jock let it go unburdened with his hatred.

It was in a subdued voice that presently he asked, "Was that all that my cousin said?"

"All that was of moment," Verney answered. "After he spoke of atonement his mind seemed to stray. He said somewhat of making some one pay swingeingly; somewhat of old days in Daske Forest — he seemed to think himself a lad again; somewhat of a girl in High Germany; and now and again he spoke of a little deal box."

Jock's stool went crashing to the floor, as he launched himself forward on the table. "That pestilence deal box!" he cried. "Verney, man! In Heaven's name, what did he say of the deal box?"

Tevery stared with dropping jaw, Framlingham puckered his brows, and Verney's face was blank. Whatever recollection they kept of delirious ravings, uttered two months before, had been driven from their heads by Jock's vehemence.

Jock saw his error, and pulling himself erect, tried to speak more steadily. "Can't you remember, Verney? Think! It means much to me. Think, man! Think!"

"Can you remember aught?" Verney appealed to Framlingham.

"He said the box was a sure get-penny, or some such folly," Framlingham contributed.

After a desperate moment of brain-racking, Verney added, "He said that under a man's nose was the surest hiding-place. Was't not so, Will?"

Tevery, tilted back on his stool in an agony of thought, dropped forward with a crash. "Look you!" he cried tri-

umphantly. "Something Johnny Hetherington said of a stone seat!"

"That had to do with the girl in Germany, had it not?" objected Framlingham.

Jock scarcely heard him. All at once, straightened, dis-entangled, he saw the threads of the web that so long had baffled him running smoothly under his hand. The little deal box, the gift of which was to be his cousin's atonement, the box that would prove to him a sure get-penny, for which Philip was to pay swingeingly, the little box that, by Philip's own tale, was left in the Captain's hands, was hidden under Philip's very nose. In his mind's eye Jock saw a stone seat — the stone seat at the head of the garden at Graystones, the very stone seat where he himself had sat kicking his heels one day of doubt and discouragement.

With a sudden catch of laughter he turned to his friends, and there was that in his bearing that made them give over their loud wrangle as to the place that the girl in High Germany had in the story.

"Lads!" said Jock. "Is there any among you will go with me adventuring? I'm minded to trace back my way to Graystones, ay, and for the sake of him that now is master of Graystones, to go myself a-hunting for that famous little deal box."

CHAPTER XXV

THE LEAGUE OF THE UNLIKELY

ESDRAS INCHCOME, a bachelor by habit and by nature, dwelt on an ancient street in Bury St. Edmund's, in an ancient house, half timbered without, and within a labyrinth of twisting passages and unexpected steps and odd little doors set in the dull wainscot. Great rafters spanned the low ceilings of the rooms, and the walls were lined with heavy presses, blackened with age, that gave out an odor of musty parchments.

In this dim legal wilderness thrived Esdras Inchcome, under the ministrations of a deaf old kinswoman who was a triumphant cook and not talkative. On this November day, in her wonted silence, she had laid the table at noon in Inchcome's favorite dim chamber in the first story, setting out a carbonadoed tongue of her own delectable concocting, and a crusty loaf, and a modest tankard of Gascoigne wine, and then discreetly had withdrawn to the obscure lower fastnesses of the old house.

In sober approval Inchcome was making his dinner, reading the while from a brown Tacitus, propped before him against a volume of Coke, when the aged kinswoman burst breathless upon him. "Cousin Esdras!" she began, and stopped as if affrighted at her own garrulity.

Inchcome turned a page of the Tacitus. "What is it, woman?" he shouted, mindful of her infirmity.

"Four gentlemen to speak with you. He says his name is Hetherington."

For a perceptible moment Inchcome hesitated, while he reflected upon several matters, chief of which was the look on Jock Hetherington's face on a former occasion, when Jock had promised, in a certain contingency, to pay him a visit. Also in that moment did the little lawyer repent of the jaunty reference that, in his last interview with Jock, he had made to the stocks and to common vagabonds.

Still, Inchcome was no coward, so, after a glance into the drawer of the table, right beneath his hand, where his pistols lay, he raised his voice to an encouraging shout, "Bid them come hither, then!"

When the woman had gone, he went on with his dinner, though soon he found himself eating to the accompaniment of loud trampling up the stair and down the passage that led to his door. With unpremeditated noise the invaders entered, for Tevery, in ignorance of the pitfalls of Inchcome's dwelling, pitched down the step into the room, and Verney, being a tall man, just missed braining himself against one of the rafters that supported the ceiling.

But Jock, with a catlike quality of keeping his feet, landed safe in the room, and halted squarely and firmly at the side of the table opposite Inchcome. He was white, with a fresh scar above the temple, and he was shabby in the doublet and breeches that had been Lieutenant Phil's, but he had acquired a sword, and a horseman's boots and hat and cloak, and thereto he had a grim manner of self-control, far different from the shaken state in which Inchcome last had seen him.

"I've come to speak with you," Jock threw out like a challenge.

"And you bring three interpreters?" said Inchcome, quietly.

Tevery struck in. "The odds were against our comrade

when you dealt with him last, d'ye mind? So this time we've come along to see fair play."

Luckily at that danger point Verney came out of the corner where he had been nursing his bumped head, and claiming acquaintance with Inchcome, set matters on a more amicable basis. With such guarantee of pacific purpose, Inchcome bade his guests be seated, a process accomplished without incident, save that Framlingham, muttering that he was fain to have more light, started to put aside the curtain that masked the window and brought it away entirely. In the flood of cobwebby daylight that brought a ghostly sense of strangeness to the room, half darkened for long, Jock and Inchcome, as they had done several times before, held conference.

"First," said Jock, in his old aggressive attitude, sitting forward with his folded arms on the table, "tell me truly, sir. Is there a second will in your lost deal box that will supersede the one now in force?"

"Absolutely," replied Inchcome.

"Under this second will, who is like to benefit?"

Inchcome smiled. "My good sir, the heirs of the late Philip Heyroun have asked me that question at least thrice each week in the past four months." He paid Jock's intelligence the compliment of not carrying his speech to a conclusion.

"Can you tell me this?" Jock changed his note. "Will the second will, the true will, put a spoke among the wheels of the present heir of Graystones?"

Inchcome smiled, a pale and wicked smile, and nodded.

Jock smiled too. "Then I have a clew to the whereabouts of that deal box," he said.

In their joint hatred of the chestnut-haired Philip, Inchcome and Jock, for once, were in accord. Without waste of words Jock told what he knew and surmised of the whereabouts of the lost deal box, and what the chestnut-haired

Philip, under constraint, had confessed at the ford on the Clegden road, and at that last piece of information, in brief words and pointed, Inchcome set forth his disapproval of Captain Wogan.

"If the man had had but an ounce of boiled brains in his skull," said Inchcome, "he would have told me this tale, even as you say that you told it unto him. Thus we should have had a clew to follow, full three weeks ago. Now, every day has made less our hope to find the box, if it be hid within the limits of Graystones. 'Tis a slender chance you offer us, yet 'tis worth the proving." Abruptly he turned to Jock. "And what's your price for this information, eh?"

Jock grinned. "You've read me rarely, sir. There is a price, yes, and 'tis that I go with you to Graystones and at my own good pleasure speak five minutes alone with Philip Heyroun."

"Let me be your second," said Tevery.

Inchcome softened to unusual good fellowship, called for wine, a parlous process with his deaf kinswoman, and made his guests to drink. Somehow, in the sequel, working through Verney Claybourne, he brought the three gentlemen to realize that he wished to speak alone with Jock and that he did not plot to do him harm. So, at Verney's suggestion, Jock's allies rose up noisily to take their way back to their inn and thence to view the town.

"For," said Tevery, cheerfully, "we shall see this matter to the end. We are all going with Jock to Graystones to find your plaguy little box!"

With this benediction, Jock and Inchcome were left alone, and Inchcome was most gracious. He had a place laid for Jock at table, and an olive pie fetched from the pantry, and urged him to eat, an invitation which Jock obeyed, though with misgiving. By his experience, Inchcome was most dangerous when most civil, but for the life of him, he could

not guess what the civil gentleman would now be driving at.

"I'll send a message post-haste to Mr. Heyroun at Draycote," Inchcome complimented Jock by making him of his counsels. "He should be with us in this matter."

"I've good hope," said Jock, "that Rafe Heyroun may draw profit from the deal box. He has shown me great kindness. Can you not tell me, sir, yes or no, whether he be an heir under this later will?"

Inchcome gave Jock a look, a curious, sceptical, half-amused look that puzzled the lad. "Upon your honor, Hetherington," he said, "had you not learned from your cousin the contents of that will when you came first to Graystones?"

Jock made no answer, save to push back his stool in an offended silence that was so real as almost to convince Inchcome.

The lawyer made his peace hastily, and at a price. "I did but jest with you, sir. Come, I believe you, and I so far trust you that I'll tell you there is that in the later will that will be of profit to Rafe Heyroun. By the way," he pursued, all the while he studied Jock, "Rafe sought you wildly when he returned a week ago from London. 'Twas not in his plan that you should be dismissed unsuccored and penniless, as I mistakenly had suffered you to be, nor was he approving of the marriage that was made that day. He sought for you, and for his little kinswoman, your wife, but we could find no trace of you. Where is the gentlewoman, I pray you?"

At the question Jock froze. Althea's wrongs were a tenderer subject than his own. "She is at Claybourne manor," he answered briefly.

"'Twas a sorry business, that last day at Graystones," Inchcome spoke gently. "Perhaps it may be mended, however. The law has wide resources, Mr. Hetherington."

Oddly enough, Jock had never thought of legal divorce as

a possibility between Althea and himself. With a selfish sense of the danger that she might escape him, with a quivering indignation that any one durst set foot on that most delicate ground between them, he rose from the table. "We've no desire to be free of each other," he said, and with curt leave-taking went away to his friends.

Would Rafe Heyroun, in the same reckless fashion, seek to thrust into his most sacred privacy, Jock wondered? He knew that by his bearing at this juncture Rafe must stand or fall in his regard, and so he waited, half in dread, for the coming of the man that had been his friend. As he discovered in the sequel, he might have spared himself that dread.

On his way from London Rafe had spent a night at Hertford with Lieutenant Phil, and from him had heard the story of Jock's surrender upon Hendie's islet. Phil had set forth the tale as a matter for laughter, but Rafe, hearing it, had not laughed. Himself he had given up much for the sake of a woman, who was now his wife. Moreover, in the light of what had come later, he was forced to recall the evening in the barley field and to take shame to himself. Whatever side Jock had fought on, he had at least been honest in his wooing of Althea, as honest and as ready to sacrifice himself as any most godly Puritan youth would have been.

So Rafe, in conscience-stricken haste, dismissed the one injurious suspicion that he had ever had of Jock, and when they met next afternoon, in the dim recesses of Inchcome's house, greeted him as a friend. He was eager to hear Jock's adventures of the last month, and he asked, with a graver note in his voice, of Jock's wife. In Inchcome's presence he made no closer queries, but that evening he sought Jock's inn, and to the accompaniment of much tobacco, had long speech alone with him.

"'Tis pity of the haste in which Althea was wedded," Rafe said frankly, "and pity that in that hour she should hold

herself forsaken of all her kindred." More he could scarcely say, for he bore upon his conscience the double load that he himself, dallying in London, prolonging his stay because he hated the thought of return to the farm, had wilfully been absent when he might have saved his little kinswoman, and that, a heavier burden still, it was his own wife's hand that, closing the door of Draycote on the girl, had sent her headlong into Jock's arms.

Of his own blame in the matter Rafe could speak, and did, briefly and honestly. Of his wife's blame, a harder part, he must needs be silent, though he offered what reparation was in his power: "Since you are bent to try your fortunes in the Low Countries, let Althea stay at Draycote in your absence. It is my wife's prayer also," he added pointedly, "and she will herself so write unto Althea."

Then, having said all that he could say, Rafe talked with Jock till midnight of that other subject, so near to their hearts, the chestnut-haired Philip.

"In his demure way my cousin was a zealous frequenter of gaming houses, and of other houses." Rafe gave, between puffs of his pipe, the chief points of the information that he had acquired in London. "Also, in Silver Street, he had borrowed money at fifty per cent. To such a pass had he brought his fortunes that he must fall heir to Graystones, and speedily, else he had surely lain in the debtors' jail. There's been false dealing, foul dealing, we all suspect, but we have no proof. I can find no link between my cousin Philip and your good cousin, the Captain. When I got word of that new will, so opportunely brought forward, of a truth I thought that for us the game was played out." He smiled, with the sudden flash of laughter in the eyes that Jock remembered. "That was how you came by your ransom. I held that we had no further use for you, but it seems that I was in error."

"Then you hope to find the box at Graystones?" Jock questioned.

Rafe shook his head. "I know not! Yet 'tis worth putting to the proof. 'Tis only by finding that lost will that ever we shall oust my cousin from Graystones. And even if we recover the will, we shall never be able to bring home to him the crime that we all suspect."

"Perchance," Jock commented, "Philip will be moved in his conscience once more to make confession."

Rafe laughed. "That's a youthful, trusting speech that does not ring right in your mouth, Yorkshire. What is it you are hiding from me?"

"Nothing, it may be," Jock replied, and left the matter thus. In detailing his adventures to Rafe, he had been silent as to what had passed in the Graystones cellar. That useful knowledge he would share with no man. In his own good time he might employ it, but with terrible patience he waited till the time should be ripe.

Next afternoon, in a cold, fine rain, six gentlemen and three stout serving fellows — for Rafe, Verney, and Inchcome had each with him a trusty man — rode severally from Bury St. Edmund's, and in the fields outside the town made rendezvous. Ill assorted as the company was, all, from the astute Inchcome to the scatter-headed Tevery, had agreed that they must not risk longer delay, but set at once about the search for the deal box. At that point they had divided in their counsels. Inchcome would have gone through the prescribed legal forms ere he entered the garden at Graystones, while Jock, true to his military training, would have searched first and got legal empowerment afterward.

Rafe had given the casting vote. "If we stay for legal warrant, Cousin Philip may get hint of warning and himself seek, find, and destroy the box. Moreover, as 'tis likely there is no box at all, we may well be riding on a wild-goose

chase, and in such case my good kinsman shall not know of our vain search and mock at us for our pains."

To this, overborne, perhaps, by the lawlessness of his five associates, Inchcome had yielded, so, with a dark lantern and a trowel under their cloaks, the trespassers set forward through the rain on their long ride to Graystones. Inchcome spoke gloomily of the unlikelihood of acquiring aught but rheumatics by the night's work, Tevery prayed that there might be some scuffling, Verney whistled, and Framlingham cursed the rain, while Jock and Rafe, each upborne by a different quality of hatred, went forward silently, like a brace of ill-matched beagles, on the trail of the chestnut-haired Philip.

It was a long ride to Graystones, and a heavy ride, now that the roads ran with water. As they had planned, it was dark when the adventurers halted in the lane that skirted the lands of the Heyrouns, but, not as they had planned, the time was something after midnight. They led the horses into a neighboring field, and after much struggling and some loss of temper, got the lantern lit. A last stormy whispered conference they had, to the tune of water dripping from their limp hat brims, in which the five other gentlemen, by the exertion of their joint powers, convinced Tevery, first, that they were not going to carry the house by a direct and noisy assay of arms, and second, that only two of their number were going to set foot in the garden.

"I told you there was no reason in your coming," Inchcome concluded. "You'll rest here with me in this sweet shower, the ging of you — and you will not rest long undiscovered, if you do not mask that lantern!" he addressed Framlingham, with sharp exasperation. "Meantime, Mr. Hetherington, since he's set to do the work, and Mr. Heyroun, since he can be trusted with the light, may disport themselves in the garden, and a merry night to them!"

In the end they had to pacify Tevery by letting him stand sentinel in the lane, and then, when the forces were at last disposed, Jock and Rafe, with the lantern and the trowel, went about their work. Stepping quietly, they crossed a strip of plashy turf and reached the garden wall. By good fortune Rafe, as a lad his uncle's favorite, had learned all the obscure corners and cat-tracks of Graystones, and so was able, in spite of the darkness, to find a spot at an angle of the wall where the rough stones and a little tree that grew adjacent made it easy for them to scramble to the top. Softly as might be, they dropped to ground within the walled enclosure of the garden, and through the sodden tangle of frost-nipped flower stalks gained the wet path of gravel, and in silence approached the house and the ancient stone seat that stood in its shadow.

As the dead man had said, this hiding-place, if it were the hiding-place that he had chosen for the deal box before he went himself to chance the fortunes of war, was under Philip's very nose. With a feeling that even to breathe were dangerous, the searchers crouched behind the seat, and by a single ray of the lantern, almost muffled under Rafe's cloak, studied its structure. When they had put aside the growth of withered vines and plants that once had flowered they found that the back of the seat came within eighteen inches of the ground, and into the mouldy space beneath Jock promptly thrust his head. Lying flat on his back, he groped his hands along the bottom and sides of the seat, but to his disappointment he discovered no secret hiding-place, such as he had hoped to find.

"We must e'en dig for it!" he whispered ruefully.

They dug, spelling each other, for what seemed endless hours. So narrow was the space that but one man at a time could work, while the other masked the lantern, all but the feeble ray that they allowed themselves, and so cramped was the position in which the worker must delve that again and

again they changed parts. At first they labored with some whispered encouragements, jests, even, at the impatience of their comrades, waiting yonder in the dark and the rain, but at last they lapsed into grim silence. Each was too stubborn to be the first to admit defeat, yet at heart each felt the weight of defeat press upon him.

The rain had slackened, and a chill breath of morning wind was abroad, when both heard the clatter of a casement flung open, right above their heads, it seemed. They crouched close, muffling the lantern, with a prompt sense of the ignominy of their position, were they caught at their digging, but they heard only a nervous female voice cry, "Who's there? Is any one stirring?"

"My Aunt Difficult!" breathed Rafe, and Jock nudged him in the ribs by way of assent.

They rested quiet yet a time, to give the gentlewoman ample leisure to return to her bed, and then, as they cautiously moved to resume their labor, Rafe let slip a soft-spoken exclamation. "Candle's burnt to the hilts, Jock, and our light is quenched."

"Let it be quenched, and a plague go with it!" Jock whispered. "I need no light to find that box."

"Nay, come away, lad," Rafe counselled, rising to his knees. "'Twas a fool's errand at best, but we had not slept easy, had we not made the trial. Come away now!"

Said Jock, prone on his stomach, with his head beneath the seat, "Go, an you will — but I feel something that's hard unto my hand."

"A rock, it well may be," Rafe answered, resolute not to be cheated with false hope.

Jock wasted no strength in reply. In the dark, prone on the wet ground, he grubbed with his hands, disdaining the trowel, while Rafe, in tense silence, waited. "Have here your rock, sir," Jock spoke at last in a muffled voice.

He rolled from beneath the seat, and thrust into Rafe's hands, that groped in the dark to receive it, a little rectangular object. Clay encrusted, worn though it was, Rafe could feel the iron-bound corners and the grain of the wood on the top and sides, and though he scarce dared credit his senses, he suspected that in his grasp he held the lost deal box.

With scant precaution they crashed their way back through the garden, scrambled over the wall, almost came to blows with their sentinel, Tevery, who mistook them in the dark, and at last rejoined their wet and bad-tempered company in the field beyond the lane.

"Your box? Rare and pretty!" said Inchcome. "And there's a paper within it, I find. Now when daylight comes, we'll see if the paper contain aught that will compensate us for this night's folly."

Wet and half frozen with the hours that he had spent in the fields, Inchcome was bound to scoff, but when at last the long-awaited dawn broke, watery and chill, he did not scoff. In the dim light he looked once upon the parchment that he took from the box, and he chuckled in grim sort, and clicked to the cover. "Come, gentlemen," said he, "Graystones stands near, and Mr. Heyroun has as good a right as any of the heirs to bid his friends seek shelter beneath that roof, and I too as chief executor under this will, do bid you thither."

Leading the horses, the nine dripping figures trailed along the lane toward the gatehouse. Once and again as they went, Inchcome chuckled, and Tevery and Framlingham grew boisterous, so that when they reached the gatehouse, they summoned the porter with a series of halloos and a thundering of sword hilts on the door that roused the household. Half because he trusted Inchcome, half because he feared Inchcome's companions, the shaking porter opened to them, and for the same good reasons a serving fellow flung the great house door wide at their approach and fled before them.

Straight forward they went, into the cold and dimly lighted hall, and there they found the family astir. The chestnut-haired Philip came down the stairway with his doublet unfastened and his sheathed sword beneath his arm, and in the dusky gallery beyond was Mistress Difficult, and thrust a little before her, very lovely in the slight disorder of her hastily donned garments and unbound hair, stood Blanche Mallory.

"What brings you hither? What is it that you seek?" asked Philip, in a stout voice.

"Only the chance to wash our hands, good cousin," drawled Rafe. "We have been digging in the garden."

"In my garden?" cried Philip, with the snap of an affrighted dog.

"No," said Inchcome, as he sat himself at the table, "in the garden of Graystones. And in our digging we chanced on this that I now hold, that haply you may have seen before."

Deliberately Inchcome set on the table in front of him the clay-encrusted box. At that sight Philip gripped the balustrade with a tense hand, and stood blinking, but before he found words to reply, Jock stepped forward and halted, with his foot on the lowermost stair.

"I lent a hand at the digging," Jock said, as he met Philip's eyes. "In truth, I showed them where to dig. I told you, kinsman by marriage, I told you on my wedding-day, remember, that I should come again to Graystones."

Jock would gladly have taken longer time to study Philip's face, but at that moment Framlingham caught him by the shoulder. "Jock," he whispered, and drew him from the stair, "who's the girl, yonder in the gallery? Faith of man! 'tis a tempting wench!"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE HUMORS OF THE DECEASED HEYROUN

It was Inchcome, chief executor under each and every one of Philip Heyroun's wills, that took into his hands the ordering of matters in this altered posture of affairs. At his instance messengers were sent posting to summon all the heirs of the late Philip Heyroun,—Martin Heyroun from his house in Essex, Lieutenant Phil from camp at Hertford, Parson Jarvis from Cambridge, Althea from Claybourne. Until their coming, Inchcome made himself at home beneath the roof of Graystones, and so did Rafe, and, at Rafe's invitation, did Jock and his three friends, who, having nothing more important to busy them, were set to see the matter to a conclusion.

Between the chestnut-haired Philip and the invaders there was armed neutrality, seasoned with suspicion. Inchcome kept the little deal box and the will that it contained within hand's reach, and at night his man lay on the truckle-bed across the door of his chamber, while Philip, for his part, eyed Jock askance and kept at a safe distance.

Jock had no thought to trouble Philip yet. To pick a quarrel prematurely might well mean for him expulsion from Graystones, and he wished to stay there, since Althea was coming. Once already he had taken leave of her, in the expectation of setting out from Graystones for the Low Countries, but he seized thankfully on the opportunity thus given him of seeing her yet again.

By times, too, Jock indulged himself in a foolish hope that somehow he might perhaps be benefited by this new will. Though he knew in his practical mind that he was leaving England, he had an illogical, yet persistent feeling that he was, in reality, going to stay. How that should come to pass, he could not guess, unless the solution lay in the little deal box that so strangely had tangled itself in with his fortunes. Perhaps, he pleased himself with fancying, the dead Philip Heyroun might have spared of his abundance some crumb for Althea, fifty pounds, say, or even as much as a hundred.

With such store in hand, he planned what he might do, and broke off with a shamed realization that in fancy he dispended the money, not merely of his wife, but of the girl that was forced to be his wife. To him personally, he resolved, the money, should it come, could make no difference, but for the sake of the girl, that she might not be left entirely penniless and dependent in his absence, he waited hopefully for the reading of the will.

While Jock waited, he watched with quiet amusement the varied dramas that were being played round him — the passages-at-arms, spicing each meal, between Mistress Difficult and Esdras Inchcome, the tingling hostile encounters of Rafe and Philip, the lively manœuvres of Mistress Mallory. Thanks, no doubt, to the intimate knowledge of affairs at Graystones, that, as the old ally of the chestnut-haired Philip, she had gained, Blanche had established herself beneath Philip's roof. As one of the household she came and went among Philip's unbidden guests, and soon she was deep in kindly intercourse with Jock's Cavalier friends. She was fair to look upon, nimble of tongue, delicately free in her bearing, with a touch of audaciousness that was new, and the men, for their part, were in their varying degrees well-favored rascals, ready-tongued, and, naturally, since they viewed affairs at Graystones in the light of a comedy,

in high good spirits. Inevitably a handsome girl in search of wooers and three idle men in quest of amusement were often together. It was none of Jock's business. He shrugged his shoulders and in silence looked on.

The second day after the discovery of the deal box Martin Heyroun and the dainty little gentlewoman, his wife, arrived at Graystones to play their part in the game. "In the devil's name, what do you here?" roared old Martin, by way of greeting to Jock, and thereafter ignored his existence, while Mistress Henrietta, mindful of the falsehood that she was proved to have uttered in regard to him, was plaintively resentful whenever he came into her presence.

Next day came Lieutenant Phil, and joined with his deep-mouthed sire in making the house reëcho with the praises of dead Uncle Philip, who had done them all right at last. Loose tongued and rattle headed in his exultation, the Lieutenant was decently civil to Jock's comrades, friendly even with Jock himself, and by this friendliness Jock profited to draw him aside to the kennels, whither it needed little importunity to draw him, and there to question him of Captain Wogan. Was he still at Hertford, perchance?

Phil shook his head. "Lambert is in London. Say no word to Rafe, a' mercy's name, else 'twill reach Rafe's wife, and all Lambert's kinswomen will be about his ears again, but Lambert has fair hope to exchange into Ireton's regiment that is ordered into Ireland."

Jock thought on the grip of Wogan's hand, twice laid to his throat, of the cold and pain that he had endured in the cellar, of insults that still rankled in his memory. On the whole, he would have liked a settlement with Wogan, — an honest settlement without advantage to either, where they could have stood up, face to face and sword in hand. From his heart he said, "I am sorry for his going."

"Ay," said Phil, "'tis rough service yonder in Ireland, and

Lambert has come by a staggering buffet, else had he never sought thus to be swallowed quick. But 'tis generous of you, Hetherington, to sorrow for him."

Said Jock, "I doubt if I do, in the sense that you are pleased to take it."

He left Lieutenant Phil, still busied with the dogs, and went for a walk to Heronswood and back. Much alone in those days, while Rafe foregathered with his kindred and his Cavalier friends dallied with Blanche Mallory, in whose company he would not be seen, he had acquired a habit of solitary, yet not unpleasant, brooding. At most times he thought of Althea and what the future might bring to her and to him, but this afternoon he thought upon Wogan, so vital a factor in his existence these last weeks, and now removed, it might well be forever, from his life.

With the hazards of his Graystones captivity clearer in memory, perhaps, than ever before, Jock was returning to the house, under the chill yellow of the sunset sky, when behind a clump of bare willows that edged the roadway he caught the flutter of a petticoat. A single glance he took, but, quick of sight as he was, he found one glance sufficient. He had recognized his friend Will Framlingham and Mistress Mallory, and they were close in speech behind the willows.

Jock walked on toward Graystones through the windy twilight, slowly, for his thought was troubled. With the past events at Graystones fresh in mind, he felt a sort of pity, the winner's pity, for Blanche Mallory. If he had known all the history of Blanche's dealings with Althea, he might have had a different feeling, but at the moment, in ignorance of the worst of her, he remembered that the girl had been in genuine anguish on the day that should have been her marriage day and proved instead the day of her shaming, and he remembered too that the girl had loved, and, he made no doubt,

for a little time had been beloved by his cousin — and with that dead cousin he was no longer at war.

Jock had reached that point in his musing, when he heard a quick step on the frozen ground behind him. Next moment Will Framlingham, with his hat cocked and his eyes a-dance, had gained his side.

"You are for Graystones, Jock?" Will asked, in a voice that was crisp and assured on the sharp air.

"I must trace back my steps for something that I seek to find," said Jock, and waited, feigning to scan the turf by the wayside, till Will had passed out of sight round the next turn of the lane.

In three men, Jock knew, there was safety; in one man there was danger, especially when the man would not be seen alone with the girl. Yielding to an impulse of which he was half ashamed, he loitered back along the path that he had come, past wayside tangles of bare blackberry bushes, under the branches of leafless beech trees, until, at a point where the hedge dwindled and the lane ran close to a pit of steel-cold water, edged with naked trees, he saw Blanche Mallory coming toward him.

She came slowly, bending head and body to the wind, and her dark hair, loosened, was blown across her face, and the vivid orange lining of her cloak showed in the tossing of the gusts. So intent was she on holding her cloak about her and keeping her blown hair from her eyes that she took no note of Jock till he stepped forward, hat in hand, and barred her path. It was the first time that he had made to speak to her since the words he had uttered in the east gallery, weeks before.

"What!" said Blanche, and her bitter surprise was not all feigned. "Will you demean yourself at last so low as to accost me, Mr. Hetherington?"

The taunting quality in her voice stung him to repentance

for his foolish thought to interfere in her affairs, yet having begun, he doggedly kept on. "Ay," said he, bluntly, "I accost you — since my friend Will has already done the like."

"Wherein may that concern you?" Blanche asked, and made as if to pass him.

He still barred her path, and angered at the tone that she took, he wasted no time in seeking for gentle words in which to say what he had set out to say. After all, he considered that the girl who had sought him in the roof room and tricked him in the east gallery had no call to make dainty at mere words. "It does not concern me," he said, "even as you have reminded me. Only, take a word of good counsel, mistress. Don't sport too long with those brisk gentlemen, my friends, else you may come by burnt fingers."

She drew herself to her full height. "Thou art a knave thus to bespeak me!" she said in a voice that rang tense with scorn.

He smiled, with the shrewd smile that she feared and hated. "Is that not somewhat stale, between us?" he said. "Be honest, mistress. 'Tis an honest warning I have given you. Take it or leave it!"

He stood aside, and, proud of carriage as ever, she swept past him and went her way. Several times thereafter he saw her, but he always remembered this moment as truly his last sight of her. He remembered her, a lonely figure, bending to the wind, with the cloak that showed the flash of orange whipping round her, and he remembered the background against which she moved,— the haggard pool by the wayside that caught a soiled reflection of the sky and the naked branches of the trees that wavered against the pallid yellow of the west.

At noon of the next day Parson Jarvis drew rein at Graystones and presented himself at the dinner table.

"Come, Inchcome!" cried Martin Heyroun, in full assembly.

"Here we be all gathered together. Now let us hear your will."

"My good sir," said Inchcome, "we have still to wait for Mistress Lovewell."

Jock looked up from his trencher. "For Mistress Hetherington," he amended with slow distinctness.

By whatever name they chose to call the girl, it was patent that, while Inchcome held the reins, her kinsfolk must wait until her coming for the reading of the will. They waited, perforce, and grumbled, the women most loudly. What was this girl, forsooth, this little pauper wench, no whit better than she should be, that for a mere legal formality affairs should stay for her? Luckily the waiting was not long. Early that same evening, crisp and far sounding on the frosty air, there was a clatter of hoofs in the lane, audible even in the hall at Graystones. "'Tis that vagrom wench at last, it may be," snorted Martin Heyroun, and Mistress Difficult, in agreement with him for once, sniffed, "And sure, 'tis high time!"

At that moment Jock was playing a hand at primero with Verney, in the little ante-chamber next the hall, but straightway he caught the sound for which all day he had listened. Like a shot he was off to the stable-court, running bare-headed through the tingling sharp darkness, and he came thither just as Althea and the attendant serving man, sent to fetch her, drew rein.

Jock lifted her from the saddle. Under the light of the dim lanterns which the grooms fetched he saw her face, rosy with the stinging air and the brisk riding, and her eyes, bright and eager, beneath her hood. Perchance it was his imagination, but he thought that her face brightened at sight of him, and that, for a moment longer than necessary, she remained standing just as she had leaped from the horse, with her two hands resting upon his shoulders.

"And are you glad in truth to see me, Jock?" she asked.

He would so fain have believed that she asked the question tenderly that he dared not let himself believe. To be sure, he steadied his wavering resolution, the girl, like a true gentlewoman and a proud soul, would greet him there before the grooms as a wife should greet her husband. She would not have them gossip and whisper that she was married against her will to a man she did not love.

Taking his cue, Jock tried to play a part to answer hers, and overplayed. "How else than glad, dear heart," he replied, "to see you again and to see you well?"

She let her hands drop to her sides. Her hands were gloved, he noted, and over her ashen gown that shaded to rose she wore a riding cloak of gray that was lined with rosy silk. Looking on her, in her dainty trimness, he grew conscious of his own shabby doublet—the doublet that had been Lieutenant Phil's. In her eyes, he reflected, he must look little better than the stableboys about them.

She caught his mood of disappointment and of trouble, without fathoming what lay behind it. With something of the sparkle gone from her face, she walked beside him to the house in a silence that matched his own.

In the hall Rafe greeted the girl with kindness, Inchcome with civility. The two women, her aunts, stood aloof, and Martin Heyroun, frankly ignoring her, cried at once for the reading of the will. "And there is no need that any but the heirs be present," he added pointedly.

Verney Claybourne laughed, took the hint, and lounged away to seek Framlingham and Tevery. Blanche Mallory long since had left the hall. "The door is still open!" said Martin Heyroun, speaking at Jock.

"I stand here to look to my wife's rights," Jock answered with emphasis, glad of a channel into which he might direct his mood of discontent.

Inchcome made an end of what might have been a sharp dispute by praying all be seated. He himself took his place at the great table with a candle at his elbow, in just such posture as Jock remembered to have seen him on the night of his first coming to Graystones, and the heirs of the deceased Heyroun sat, so to speak, in two camps round Inchcome — the chestnut-haired Philip, Parson Jarvis, and Mistress Difficult at one end of the table, Martin Heyroun, Mistress Henrietta, and Lieutenant Phil at the other. With a feeling that he and Althea were shut out from either camp, Jock led her to a seat on the bench near the door, a little withdrawn from the others. He remembered it always, that Rafe, as on a sudden impulse, came across the room and sat down on a stool hard by and gave Althea a word or two of news about the children at Draycote.

Indeed, the girl needed comfort at that moment. Jock, a fighting man by nature and with a sword now at his side, could go and come in that hall, with no recollection of the humiliations he had undergone in that spot, save with the heartening resolve to score them out on those that had made him suffer. With the girl it fared differently. Sitting there, apart and outcast from her kin, she recalled with aching heart the bitter shame of the marriage forced upon her in that place, under the eyes of the jeering servants. She paid small heed to Rafe's kindly meant discourse, and the moment that he fell silent, she sought Jock's hand with hers and whispered: "Must we stay here? I would so much liefer be gone, even as they wish."

Jock gave her hand an encouraging pressure. "Be sure we'll stay!" he answered beneath his breath. "I'd not miss this for a thousand pound. Look but on Philip yonder."

Althea had no wish to look at the circle of faces in the candlelight at the table, but Jock, with steady eyes of hatred, watched Philip. Grimly fighting, like a rat in a corner, the

chestnut-haired Philip had taken the only course that was open to him. Throughout the days of suspense he had declared himself rejoiced that his uncle's will had been recovered, and loudly professed himself confident that in essentials the last two wills were alike. But his face, while he waited for the reading, gave the lie to his words. The hue of his skin made Jock think of soiled putty, his eyes blinked fast, and his set mouth showed a thin and lipless line.

By now Inchcome, reading in a methodical and deliberate voice, had finished the preamble, to which no one had given much heed. Following that, came some minor bequests to servants and dependents, just and sensible, it seemed. Martin Heyroun snorted audibly at this long delay, and Lieutenant Phil shifted his feet. "Get to the matter in hand!" he muttered half aloud. Inchcome rewarded the discourtesy by pausing long enough to snuff the candle, and then, in the heightened light that showed the pallid and malign smile upon his lips, he began the main portion of the will. Jock, listening, felt a kind of liking for the deceased Philip Heyroun, and a kind of pity, as he read between the lines what must have been his life among his assiduous kinsfolk.

"To my wife's niece, Blanche Mallory," read Inchcome: "Forty shillings, which I counsel her to dispend in folly, knowing full well that she will so dispend it without counsel of mine.

"To my nephew Jarvis: Ten marks, wherewith, since he is set upon a profession which at heart, whatever I may have said, I do loath, let him buy him a gown and bands and a seemly wig.

"To my dear sister Difficult:—"

The gentlewoman named sought for her handkerchief. "My poor brother!" she sighed. "I sincerely believe he is in a happier place."

"To my dear sister Difficult," Inchcome went on: "A

mourning ring of the value of five shillings, since she is a pious despiser of worldly gear, and I pray her not to grieve too deeply for me.'"

In the malicious pause which Inchcome made, Mistress Difficult put up her handkerchief. "A despiser and a scoffer at holiness!" she said aloud. "I hope that he is in a better place." Her look belied her words.

"To my brother Martin,'" Inchcome's level voice went on: "My ship the *Warwick* which, by his folly and loss of temper, he suffered be sunk in the strait of Dover in the year '46.'"

For once Martin Heyroun was overcome. With dropping jaw he sat dumb, and the other heirs, in like appalled silence, awaited what blow they in their turn might be dealt by that merciless document.

"To my good sister Henrietta,'" Inchcome resumed with relish: "All the marcasite and jet pins of which my deceased wife died possessed.

"To my nephew Philip, son to the said Martin and Henrietta: The Barbary horse from my stable, on which I make no doubt he will ride to the devil.

"To my nephew Philip, son to my deceased brother Benjamin: The hundred crowns which, on the night of May the seventeenth, he took from my strong box, thinking me to be sleeping. I do not always sleep when my eyes are shut.'"

In the silence, while all eyes sought him, the chestnut-haired Philip sat rigid, blinking, and save for that motion of the eyelids, with the face of a dead man.

"And the rest of my property,'" read Inchcome, in a loud voice, "my houses, my farms, my lands, my ships, my rents, and tenements, and all moneys whereof I die possessed, I give in two equal shares to those two of Heyroun blood who have shown the spirit of Heyrouns in that they have dared set their wills in opposition to mine and for all my wealth

have never cringed unto me —to my nephew, Ralph Heyroun of Draycote, and to Althea Lovewell, the child of my dear sister Mary, deceased, with the provision that Ralph shall have the ancient manor house at Heronswood, and that Althea shall have my house of Graystones, and that the said Ralph and my good friend Esdras Inchcome shall watch over and safeguard the interests of the said Althea until such time as she takes her a husband.' ”

Inchcome laid down the paper, and for a moment, as if a thunderbolt had fallen, there was blank and stricken silence in the hall. Then, with a little scuffling of feet and rustling of garments, all turned instinctively to the obscure corner where until that moment Althea had sat forgotten. Under their eyes the girl started to her feet, white-faced, with her arms, in her old gesture of affright, crossed upon her breast.

“But, Mr. Inchcome! Is that true?” she cried. “I am become a rich woman?”

Said Inchcome: “You are possessed this hour, mistress, of the house in which we sit, of three farms, of divers ships at sea, and of revenues that will mount to near five thousand pounds the year. You are one of the richest heiresses in the shire, and thanks to you,” he turned suddenly on Mistress Difficult, “the heiress is already fitted with a husband.”

CHAPTER XXVII

THE HUMOR OF THE LIVING HETHERINGTON

It was late in the evening before the company in the hall disbanded, and during that time much was spoken that had far better been left unsaid. Though the chestnut-haired Philip, bowing to defeat, had for the most part kept silent, his brother had raged, and his mother, in the end, had wept, while Martin Heyroun, loudest of them all, had insisted that the will by which Althea was enriched at the expense of her kindred should instantly be set aside.

Inchcome turned at last upon old Martin. "Do you bear in mind," he counselled, "that, should you succeed in setting aside this latest will to spite your niece, you will deprive your son Rafe of his heritage."

At that hint Martin Heyroun sat in fuming silence, but his wife still cried out upon the injustice of what had been done, till Althea could bear no more. "I never sought nor asked for the wretched money!" she cried piteously. "I do not wish it. I pray you, good Mr. Inchcome, take it back."

There Rafe spoke, and with the burden on his conscience of the wrong that Althea had suffered at his wife's hands, he spoke in the girl's behalf, and because he spoke now as Heyroun of Heronswood, he won the readier attention. "I pray you, peace, all!" he said. "'Tis a lawful will and shall stand, and Althea, whom my uncle chose his heir, shall enjoy all of which by its terms she is possessed, ay, and this very

hour shall enter on possession. Inchcome and I will look well to her interests."

"Be sure!" said Inchcome. "Such was the wish of the deceased Philip Heyroun."

Through all the controversy Jock had sat silent. At first, in the suddenness of the good fortune that had befallen him, he had been too bewildered to risk speech, and then, as he grasped matters more firmly, he had seen no call for wasting words. Let the Heyrouns talk all that they would, pouring forth unchecked their disappointment and their jealousy. When he saw the time fit he would repeat what he had said once before, that he stood for Althea's rights against them all and that, with Verney Claybourne and his kindred to aid him, with the allies that the prospect of an ample fortune would bring him, he made no doubt but that he could enforce those rights.

But when Rafe had spoken, saying the word that Jock had had it in mind to say, Jock maintained his silence in a different temper. Slowly he felt grow upon him the sense of his aloofness from the scene on which he gazed. Only by right of his wife, by right of the girl, forced, unwilling, to bear his name, did he sit there. The sole justification of his presence would have been her need of him to champion her cause, and that duty Rafe Heyroun, whom he trusted, and Esdras Inchcome could discharge far better than could he. Later when he had time for thought, he saw a reckoning with himself in prospect. For now he waited in a silence that was half sullen.

The moment came at last when, because there was no more to say, the company broke up. Rafe, ordering matters, called in the steward. "See that the great chamber is made ready," he bade, "for Mistress — Hetherington. Henceforth she is mistress here."

Rawly sensitive, Jock took note that even Rafe hesitated at Althea's new name. Mindful at that moment only of the

hurt of that slight from Rafe, he stood quiet, and in that moment Mistress Henrietta had sought Althea's side. He saw through the pitifully open purpose of the little woman, who would make her peace at once with the heiress, and so petty and so sorry did it seem, that he would not seek to combat it by thrusting himself forward. If Althea called him to her, good, but Althea, after one questioning glance in his direction, raised her chin in her old defiant manner, and without deigning to give a word to her Aunt Henrietta, bade her kinsfolk good night in a steady voice, and went away up the stair.

Jock watched till he lost sight of Althea in the shadows of the gallery, and he waited, standing by the door, till the two other gentlewomen had gone their ways and Jarvis had gone with his mother. While he waited he felt the dour anger that he had cherished for days flare with the fresh kindling that these new exasperations, albeit from other sources, had heaped upon it. At least, whatever he might have to face next day, in the new complication of the heiress wife who was not his wife, and her pack of jealous kindred, for that night he had before him the chestnut-haired Philip. With his habit of doing the immediate thing, he set, according to a plan so long fostered that perhaps, even if he would, he could not have disregarded it, to scoring out his grudge against his old enemy.

In the midst of the shifting of places, the brief exchange of words with which the men were separating for the night, Jock went swiftly from the hall and in the kitchen that he knew of old found him a crust of bread, which he bestowed in his pocket. Then he sought out Verney Claybourne, forsaken all the evening by his mates and hence disconsolate, and with Verney in attendance he strode back to the hall. There he found the little company of Heyrouns just dispersing. Old Martin, indeed, had clambered halfway up the staircase, holding to Lieutenant Phil's arm, and Rafe and Inchcome stood in speech at the stair-foot, but the chestnut-haired Philip still

sat staring before him in the place at table where he had sat throughout the hours of his overthrow.

Straight across the hall Jock went and halted opposite the chestnut-haired Philip. "Mr. Heyroun, I would speak a word with you now," he said. In his voice was a note that, albeit without design upon his part, made those that were on the staircase pause and look toward him. "Will you fetch your sword?" Jock went on, leaning forward a little with both hands on the table. "Send also for your brother that he may see fair play, and I have here an honest gentleman that will be my second."

On the staircase Martin Heyroun spoke a word beneath his breath to his son Phil, and Inchcome's gray face lighted with a sudden gleam that as suddenly died. If the gentlemen had the hope that, most opportunely for the kindred of the married heiress, Jock might engage in a duel, as fatal to him should he slay his adversary as it were should he himself be slain, they found that hope defrauded, and for that disappointment they had no one to thank but the chestnut-haired Philip.

Coward at heart, and conscious of what reason the man that confronted him had in seeking vengeance, Philip durst not for very life accept the challenge. Without making a movement to rise, he looked at Jock, and blinked, avoiding the gaze of the steady gray eyes that met his. "Word o' truth!" he said in a voice that shook. "Am I to be affronted, even in this house, by every out-at-elbow sworder? Here is no tavern to brawl in, sirrah!"

Jock turned then to the men, Philip's kindred, who each and all had left the staircase and drawn near. "I pray you all, go hence!" he said. "Though this gentleman will not fight in honorable combat, I yet will speak for a moment alone with him."

With a look in the eyes that Jock remembered, Rafe Heyroun headed at once from the hall, and Inchcome, smil-

ing faintly, took up a candle and made as if to follow, but Martin Heyroun, on principle, hesitated to do Jock's bidding.

"Will you go?" Jock repeated. "Make me not to remind you, sir, that under this roof you are now my guests."

They went then, Lieutenant Phil looking back as if loath to go, and Rafe coaxing out his almost apoplectic father. Last of all went Verney Claybourne, and on the threshold he turned with his hand on the latch. "Good speed to you, Jock!" said Verney. "I'll keep the door, and my life on't, none shall come hither to disturb you."

As he spoke Verney banged to the door, and while the echo still lingered in the vaulted roof of the hall, Jock sat himself down on a stool opposite Philip at the table, just as he had sat him once before, on the day that had been the day of his marriage. That day Philip must have borne in mind, and other days, for in the candlelight his face was thin and drawn.

"It was for the sake of three men that I came back to Graystones," Jock explained patiently, leaning forward with his folded arms upon the table. "For Esdras Inchcome, he is serviceable to my friend Claybourne and thereto he is a lawyer, such as are licensed to be greater knaves than other men. For Lambert Wogan, he avowed his purpose to do me hurt and did it, so far as he was able, and I will do the like by him an I meet him, and there's an end on't. But for you, sir, you did seek me out and profess to be my friend, even while you meditated that which you pleasantly named an accident, there at the ford on the way to Clegden. And I am also, sir, your debtor for a certain dish of comfortable meat."

As he noted the spasm of twitching that racked Philip's white face, Jock acquitted Blanche Mallory of any least part that he might have suspected her to have had in preparing the food that had been set before him in the cellar. Well assured, he resumed his speech. "You will not fight me as I

prayed you, Mr. Heyroun. Still, you shall do penance for what you put in practice." From his pocket Jock drew the crust of bread, and cast it on the table before Philip. "Eat it!" he bade.

Because Philip was coward to the heart, he lost in that moment all sense of reason and of likelihood that might have saved him. With a womanish cry he half rose from the table, and at that movement Jock flashed his sword clear and stood over him. "You would not fetch your sword, though I bade you," Jock spoke between his teeth. "Now—eat that bread!"

In the end Philip ate the bread, or a portion of it, because Jock had a sword and much strength and skill in the art of scuffling, and thereto the best reasons in the world for not sparing the man who now was at his mercy. Philip ate half the bread, and then Jock left him lying by the hearth, a mere crumpled heap of garments, and made his way across the hall to the door. He went amid thick shadows where the flickering glow of the fire gave the only light, for in the struggle with Philip the table had been overthrown and the candles had gone out, and as he went, he nursed a bitten hand. But despite the hurt in his hand, Jock smiled to himself, for he could hear the while Philip's voice that whimpered in the dark.

Jock flung the door open, and stood a moment peering upon the startled faces of the men without. Having ears, they must have heard the sounds of the scuffle in the hall and the bitter outcries, which had not been wrung from him, but even had Verney not been there to block the way, he doubted if any man of them would have come in to succor Philip. They came in now, however, when the work was done, and Martin Heyroun, glancing toward Philip's prostrate form, gave a cry. "You rogue!" he turned on Jock, and his voice rang satisfied. "An you have slain this man, I swear that you shall hang!"

"In which event, my good Martin," said Inchcome, "we all are like to be hanged along with him as accessories."

The word "hang" seemed to have reached the consciousness of the chestnut-haired Philip. He dragged himself up on his bent elbow, turning to his kinsmen a face that showed ghastly and disfigured in the mingled light of the fire and of the pale candle that Inchcome held. "Ay, sirs!" he cried, and with effort pointed to Jock, who midmost of the little group still nursed his bitten hand. "Look well to that fellow! See that he wins the gallows to requite him — the foul murderer! He forced it upon me. With my dying breath I say it. He has poisoned me."

With a whistle of dismay Lieutenant Phil stepped back a little from where he stood near to Jock, and Martin Heyroun, most ostentatiously, did the same. "Well?" said Inchcome, but Rafe Heyroun, standing in shadow, wasted no words, while he watched Jock's face.

"And wherefore," said Jock, "should you hold that I would poison you? How know you that the pain that racks you comes not from food that you ate long hours since? How know you that the bread I gave you was not good bread?"

At that the chestnut-haired Philip began to laugh, and barking with laughter, dropped his head on his arms and lay writhing. In that moment Jock caught Rafe's eye, and after that they two, at least, no longer played at cross purposes. Straight to his prostrate kinsman went Rafe and touched his shoulder. "Give us the grounds wherefore you do suspect this man," he said, "and you, gentlemen, be witnesses all, and you, Hetherington, stand you forward that your accuser may look upon you."

In the half light Jock stood, ringed round by the semicircle of doubting men, and looked upon Philip's face that was eager with hatred of him, and beyond Philip met Rafe's eyes that in their merriment were terrible.

"I know he sought to slay me," Philip cried exultantly, "because he would avenge himself — because aforetime I did the trick myself — because I put rosaker in meat that was meant for him, what time he was a prisoner here in the Graystones cellar."

"You devil!" said Lieutenant Phil, and said it honestly.

"There is the reason for this that he has done," cried Philip, unregarding. "He has slain me — bear me witness, sirs! The law will not excuse him, you know it well, Inchcome, for that I first did strive to slay him. He is a murderer — a proven murderer. Ay, and you shall hang, you gallows' dog!" he shrieked at Jock. "Look to it, kinsmen! Look to it, I charge you!" and there the chestnut-haired Philip collapsed, face down upon the floor, and moaned aloud for a doctor.

"How long has he to live?" said Rafe, in the perturbed silence that was broken only by Philip's groans. "You should know — you scoundrel!" he addressed Jock, with entire gravity.

Jock, in kind, made answer, "Faith, a doctor will do him no good!"

Then did the chestnut-haired Philip wail with exceeding bitterness where he writhed upon the floor, and even as he had done by the ford on the Clegden road, began to confess his sins to Heaven and all hearers: "A doctor! Rafe! Uncle Martin! In Heaven's mercy, fetch a doctor! I cannot die — I dare not — hell gapes for me — and I durst not go to encounter my uncle that is slain."

"Your passing will be the easier if you make full confession of that which burdens your soul," suggested Rafe. "Tell us all that pertains to your dealings with our dead kinsman — tell it, and I swear that if you die now, I will see to it that this man Hetherington is hanged, and so will my father and my brother."

They gave that promise, old Martin with notable zealousness, and then the chestnut-haired Philip fixed Jock with eyes of hatred and poured out the confession that was to buy him vengeance.

"Sirs, 'tis true that I had knowledge of Captain Hetherington aforetime. We had spent merry nights together. 'Twas I that counselled him make his landing at this part of the coast, long months since. I held that he might prove useful unto me. He was a desperate fellow, and I was at a desperate pass. Death o' my soul! 'twas all fault of that dead villain, mine uncle. Heaven guard him! I speak no ill of him, now that he is dead. But he had borne me in hand, letting me think that in time all should be mine. I had borrowed in expectation thereof —"

"At fifty per cent," Rafe murmured.

"I knew that his will gave all unto me. But he did not die — he did not die! Mayhap if Captain Hetherington should attack the house — Nay, nay, 'twas not for that I bade the Captain hither — I swear 'twas not for that," he repeated to the incredulous faces that lowered upon him, and then, as if acquiescent in the unspoken charge, he changed his tone: "In any case, ere the Captain came, my uncle made another will. I suspected that he knew of the hundred crowns that I had borrowed from his strong box. I was feared of that second will. So I moved the Captain to bring from his chamber the box and the two wills that lay within."

"At that moment," said Inchcome, "your Uncle Philip Heyroun lay sick of an apoplexy. You knew that a violent burst of passion would be his death. You knew that the seizure of that box, beneath his very eyes, would provoke him to frenzy. 'Twas not alone to take the deal box that you sent Captain Hetherington into that chamber. Designedly you made him the instrument of your kinsman's death."

Under the old lawyer's eyes, Philip sank down with face hidden. "But Hetherington played false!" he whimpered piteously. "'Twas naught but the earlier will he gave into my keeping. He took the other will and the box that held it. He would not let me look thereon. He took the other will, and he swore outright that henceforth he would have of me such moneys as he chose to ask, else through that will he would undo me. And then," cried Philip, with a sudden upfling of the head, "he sent this other devil to torment me — even when he was dead he sent this other devil. Between them they have tricked me and ruined me, but you'll pay for it!" he raged up into Jock's stolid face. "You'll pay — hell rot your bones! You'll hang — you'll hang in chains —"

"Will I so?" said Jock, with the sudden hateful grin that bared his teeth. He stooped and took from the floor the mangled and trodden remnant of the crust of bread. "Will you have more of it, cousin by marriage?" he said, proffering the morsel, which Philip promptly identified by clapping his arm across his mouth. "Then," said Jock, "I'll make shift to eat it myself. 'Tis good bread, gentlemen, and harmless, and it came of the loaf that we ate at supper."

In a silence where comprehension deepened, Jock leisurely ate the bread to the last crumb, and then, on the sudden, Verney Claybourne threw back his head with a shout of laughter, and fetched Jock a thwacking blow between the shoulders. Instantly Lieutenant Phil, savoring the jest at last and from the camp standpoint relishing it, joined in, and Martin Heyroun, although loath to commend Jock, made an unwilling third for the sake of smiting the chestnut-haired Philip.

In very truth there seemed no need to strike him lower. Betrayed by his own coward fear, the man who was self-confessed a thief and an assassin, had not the spirit even to curse Jock who had undone him. White, furtive-eyed,

broken, he crouched against the hearth where he lay. "Get up, sirrah!" Inchcome bade savagely. "'Tis no poison, merely conscience that ails you. Get up! We that stand for your dead kinsman have now to speak with you," but Philip bowed his head and made no movement to rise.

It had been in Jock's mind that when this, the final moment, came, he should laugh, but he did not. In his pocket he handled a shilling that he had borrowed of Verney, with the express purpose of giving it to Philip then and there, even as Philip, days earlier, had given him a shilling before his gaping household. But as he looked at Philip, beggared of goods and fame, beggared of what poor manhood had been his, he felt that his purposed revenge had lost its savor. To strike now at the chestnut-haired Philip was no more pleasurable than to spurn a truss of mouldy straw. On sudden impulse Jock took up his sword that had gone to ground in the scuffle and struck it back into the sheath.

"Sirs," he said to the men who watched him, with what for once was grudging approval, "long since you questioned me here in this hall, touching your little deal box that was gone astray, and now I have answered you, albe through another mouth, and now, sirs, I am going hence to bed, for I hold that my work is done."

CHAPTER XXVIII

BY RIGHT OF HIS WIFE

TRUE to his word, Jock went to his bed, in his old quarters in the roof room that he himself, this time, had chosen to occupy, but, contrary to his purpose, he did not sleep. Turning and tossing there in the dark, he reviewed the tangle of the past months, made straight at last, — the sinister old companionship of the chestnut-haired Philip and Captain Hetherington, the blood-stained seizure of the deal box in which the strong ruffian had outplayed the weak trickster, his own blind part in the story, first Philip Heyroun's puppet, then, to the guilt-stricken man, a menace, and at the last his betrayer. Part by part, he followed each actor in the story, — Philip, the Captain, Blanche Mallory, the dead Heyroun, Esdras Inchcome.

When Jock came to Inchcome, he came near to the problem that he would leave for the present untried — the knotty problem of his whole relation to Althea. This much, at least, was clear: Inchcome alone had known the contents of the last will, the one made in May, and though he knew that Althea was prospectively an heiress, he had in due legal fashion kept that knowledge from her kin. Holding the girl a pawn in the game, to be left in the box until needed, he had taken no thought for her comfort, even for her safety. Why should he pain himself, he seemed to have reasoned, when the girl was well enough where she was, and perchance, if

the lost will were not found, would remain a poor relation to the end of her days? Thus carelessly had Inchcome guarded her, and thus, by the slippery sport of fate, the heiress had been wed in haste to the first stray trooper that presented himself, "an out-at-elbow sworder," as Philip had named him. Jock laughed at the jest, and in the dark and the silence was startled at the sound of that bitter laughter.

Yes, there was much to think upon before he could tell how he should bear himself toward Althea and toward the Heyrouns, but for now, in the early hours of the morning, his head was heavy and his brain was fairly stiff with sleepiness and long thinking. In the daylight when he woke clear-headed, he would have an hour to himself, there in the bare roof room, and then, according to his wont, he would discover what was next to do.

In this expectation Jock fell asleep, but he found the expectation vain. He did not wake of himself, alone in the roof room, for a quiet hour of reflection. He woke because some one was shaking him by the shoulder, and when he came alertly from his sleep, he found that the room was clear with daylight and over him stood Rafe Heyroun, grave-faced, with a letter in his hand.

"What's to do?" said Jock, and sat up, screwing his knuckles into his eyes.

"Your friends, Tevery and Framlingham, are gone," Rafe answered. "They left the house last night."

"Truth," said Jock, "we might have known they had something in hand to busy them, else they'd have had a share in the brangle, there in the hall."

"And," Rafe continued, "this same night Mistress Mallory too is gone."

Jock whistled, extremely wide awake by now. "They did not make me of their counsels, but I suspicioned something," he said. "They left a letter?"

Rafe handed it to Jock. "Given in charge to one of the serving men to give to you this morning. I sought you out at once. In some sort the young woman was under our protection."

Jock nodded as he opened the letter. "'Tis from Dick," he summarized the first of the two sheets. "He says that in my new fortunes they hold my plans are altered, so they are embarking for the Low Countries without staying for me. They take ship this day from Clegden. Faith, they are embarked by now! He adds that Will has chosen him a sweet comrade for the journey."

"And the woman herself?" asked Rafe, still gravely.

Already Jock was deep in the second sheet that had been enclosed within the first — a fair little letter, written in a fine, clear hand. He read, at first with a puzzled face, and then, in slow comprehension, he smiled.

"She was fain to have it," he said at last, glancing up at Rafe. "She writes fleeringly, sir, pluming herself on having the last word and the last laugh of me. Truth, you folk at Graystones must oftentimes have marred matches on which she had set her heart! She holds that I was endeavoring to do the same." He passed the letter to Rafe. "Read, an you will. I warned her for her own sake — Heaven knows wherefore! She thought I meant to save my friend from marrying with her."

"Marriage?" said Rafe, with a shrug. "Why, then, we have no concern in this."

"Ay, married yesternight at Clegden to Will Framlingham," said Jock. "And Will, to my sure knowledge, has one wife in the West Country and another in the Palatinate. When all's said, she was but a novice in the grim trade of pleasuring, and Will is a gentleman of wide experience. She would better have taken my warning and not have sported with him."

In silence Rafe scanned the letter, the writing of the girl, triumphant in her sense of having outwitted them, who, as they knew, was herself most tragically outwitted. He read, and frowning, put aside the paper. "Well," said he, "ere this she is embarked upon the high seas, beyond our reach of interference. And in any case, 'tis not our business. She is woman grown, and ere she went upon this path she had fair warning. Moreover," he added, with cynical memories of the girl, "I'll swear she was herself one-half the wooer."

In such terms the two men spoke Blanche Mallory's farewell, and putting by the subject in the moment while Jock shredded the letters to scraps, fell to speaking of other things.

"My kinsman Philip left the house at daybreak," Rafe informed Jock. "We had some speech with him, Inchcome and I. 'Twere better than that he should be haled into the courts, for, after all, our blood is in his veins. He leaves the country as soon as he can get shipping, and he will not return. His mother and his brother Jarvis are minded to quit Graystones this day, even this hour. 'Tis nine o'clock of the morning by this time, Yorkshire. You'd best be stirring, for you'll find enough to busy you."

It was the only word of Rafe's that could be construed into an admission that Jock's standing in the house had altered in the last hours, and even that word was carefully non-committal. Jock reflected upon this after Rafe had gone and he was dressing. Plainly Rafe meant to observe a strict neutrality in the impending conflict.

With a growing desire to fight, Jock took his way down the stair, and in the lobby below met with one of the serving men. At another time he might have been amused by the evident perplexity of the fellow who, sharing the embarrassment of his betters, scarcely knew how to treat the new master of Graystones. At the moment, however, he felt no amusement, only rising anger.

"If it like you, sir," the fellow hesitated, "Mr. Martin Heyroun would speak with ye at once, and I am sent to fetch ye."

"Tell Mr. Heyroun," Jock answered promptly, "that I am his servant to speak with him for an hour, at two of the clock this afternoon in the hall. For now I am otherwise busied."

He left the man staring and strode upon his way. He had spoken, as he thought, without premeditation, but he realized now that the speech was the logical outcome of the speculations, the planning, the arguing, that, almost without his control, had gone on in his brain ever since he had listened to the will that made his wife an heiress. Born in a country that was the mother of shrewd men and hard-headed, he knew that he was not by nature one to give up a fair estate for any mere scruple, and moreover, in the sequel of Martin Heyroun's message, as curt a message as would have been sent him, had he been still a paroled prisoner in that house, he felt his blood tingle with the lust of combat. Obstinate by habit, even as in the old days he had broken out of Graystones because the Heyrouns were set to hold him prisoner, he was determined now to stay at Graystones because the Heyrouns would have him gone.

He descended to the hall, and with a feeling that he choked for fresh air, passed out into the garden. He was minded to go still farther, into the fields, but as he turned toward the garden gate he heard a light step behind him, and when he faced about, he fronted Althea. She had come quickly, so that her hood had slipped back, and her hair was disordered about her forehead, and her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes shone. So she had looked there on the islet, on the highway, when she was his, all his. Gazing upon her now, Jock fairly cursed the fortune that barred the way between them — the way that otherwise, somehow, he might have bridged.

For the fortune's sake, he spoke almost as if she were an enemy, "Well, mistress?"

"I've labored cruel hard," she said, and smiled to win his smile. "My Aunt Henrietta sticks to me closer than any brother. Such a wearisome woman!"

"Ay, mistress," he answered, full of his own thought, "but you are now a jewel worth the guarding."

She sighed, and her eyes grew wistful. "Such a deal of money, Jock!"

"Ay, a deal!" he said shortly.

"I am glad that you are here," she began, and faltered under his sullen look, and changed her sentence, "glad that you are here to help me look to it."

He laughed. "In that Rafe Heyroun or Inchcome have far more skill to serve you than have I. In all my life, mistress, I never handled the worth of fifty crowns at one time."

In his bitterness he spoke more savagely than he had meant to speak, and he saw, spite of the proud set of the girl's lips, the hurt look that sprang to her eyes. He had the impulse to try to comfort her, and checked it, full of shame that in his very declaration of poverty, in her recent acknowledgment of wealth, he had been about to woo her.

In that moment of hesitation came Lieutenant Phil, swaggering down the path, with a new outspoken friendliness for Althea and his old contemptuous coolness even heightened for Jock. "Well, cousin," he cried, "give me good speed! My leave is at an end, and I ride this day to Hertford."

She said as, mistress of the house, she was bound to say: "I am sorry for your going. You will come unto us again, good cousin?"

"Ay, surely," answered Phil, "an you bid me do so!"

Jock turned on his heel and walked away. Since he was her husband by no wish of hers, he might order her fortune, but he would not order her friends. He left her with Lieu-

tenant Phil and went away to the stables, where he sought to cheer himself with the sight of the horses, a dearer sight than ever now that he could tell himself that every beast of them was his. A man were a fool indeed to let slip his hold on such a stable.

Then, in the midst of this, the one mood approaching cheerfulness that he had known that day, he fell to other thoughts and reddened with shame. Steadied again to the likeness of himself, he saw that Althea had come to speak with him in decent civility, as a wife should, that she had been courteous to her kinsman as was the duty of a hostess, and he had replied with loss of temper and gone to seek him comfort among the horses. He was a stableboy, he reflected, with all his savagery turned now upon himself, and she was a gentlewoman, and he was not fit to live beneath the same roof with her.

On that day Jock might well have prayed to be delivered from his friends, for just as he was softening to a mood in which he was almost ready to find Althea and strive to have a clear understanding with her, Verney Claybourne sought him. "For now, Jock," said Verney, "you can bid me farewell. I am posting back to Claybourne to carry my mother the good tidings of you and of Mistress Hetherington."

They were alone in the corner of the stable where they stood, near the horse-stalls, and at that moment, inspired of the devil, Verney caught Jock by the shoulders and pinned him against the wall, in such wise that he could neither fight nor flee nor mask his face from the other's scrutiny. "Look you, Jock," said Verney, "what's amiss between you and your wife?"

"Naught," said Jock, and swore. "Take your hands from me."

Jock struggled as he spoke, but Verney was the bigger and the stronger, and, more to the point, knew of old his favorite

tricks of attack. He held Jock in the same position in which he first had pinned him. "What a plague!" said he, "you're no child. You should know how to deal with a woman."

"I do," Jock answered. "But wives are different. I never had one ere now."

"Pshaw!" said Verney. "Wives are women. Go kiss her and make up your difference."

Said Jock, in extremity, "Let me go, else I'll kick the heart out of you!"

As this was in the nature of a challenge, Verney held firm and, anticipating Jock's movement, won him to quiet with a crafty kick on the ankle. "I'll let you free in a moment," he said, "but first I'll give you a piece of good counsel, though I know you will despise it. You've much at stake here in this game, and you're a fool to risk all, because of a silly lovers' quarrel. Your little wife's kinsfolk are buzzing about her while you're sulking in corners. Do you go speak a word or two in her ear to make things even. Man, she's your wife!"

"Are you done?" said Jock, in a dangerous voice.

"I am," said Verney, and released him. "Now I'll leave Graystones ere you set the dogs upon me."

Verney went his way, and try as he would, Jock could give him only a half-civil farewell. For Verney, with his calm assumption of understanding, had touched the sorest spot in Jock's heart and set it aching. If it had been a lovers' quarrel, as Verney took for granted, if they had been lovers, all would have been easy.

Dinner at Graystones that day was in the nature of an ordeal for all concerned, but it ended at last, and then, quite as Jock had expected, Mistress Henrietta, all unmindful of his existence until that hour, prayed him attend her into the parlor. He could not well deny her as he had denied her husband earlier in the day, so in the parlor he spent a half hour, uncomfortable to them both. He heard in silence,

while he studied the woman's face with eyes that disconcerted her, all that a gentleman in his place should do, all that was to say of the girl's youth and inexperience and the cruelty of her position, forced into a hateful marriage, all that could be hinted as to her heart's being engaged elsewhere, the whole discourse seasoned with tears and womanly pleas and spiced by times with sharp side-comments on himself. He heard her to the end, and then he rose and courteously held open the door for her to pass.

"Mistress," said he, "I have small love to those that would come provoking dissension between man and wife. Your coach will be in readiness at three of the clock, and I wish you a pleasant journey into Essex."

He handed her to the staircase, he gave the needful directions about the coach, and then he lit him a pipe and stood smoking before the fire in the hall, while he waited for two o'clock and his interview with Martin Heyroun. Lashed by the events of the last hours, he waited in as stubborn a fighting mood as ever he had known.

At two of the clock, the hour of his naming, they came to the hall, the three men who alone were left to represent the Heyrouns,—old Martin, stumping on his wooden leg and eying Jock beneath beetle brows, Rafe, dark, taciturn, and for once not all at ease, and Inchcome, dry, inscrutable, with his formal face of legal business. They set themselves at the great table, while Jock still kept his stand by the hearth. Even though it was the moment before battle, he gave a flitting backward thought to his first hour in that place, when under far different conditions he had fronted those same men, and he found that he was to fight, not merely for his present possession, but to avenge all that he had suffered in the past.

"Well, Mr. Hetherington," said Inchcome, smiling almost as if he had read Jock's thought, "you surely have the whip-hand of us now."

"Come to the point!" growled Martin.

"But at least," Inchcome pursued his tranquil way, "we can discuss the matter with due calmness, eh?"

Jock nodded, not taking the pipe from his mouth, and his eyes burned into the faces before him. Rafe, at least, looked at him curiously, in some doubt of his promise to be calm. After all, as the black Heyroun realized, Jock was little more than a boy, and that day he was battling in deep waters.

"You may remember," Inchcome continued, "that I spoke once unto you of the wide resources of the law. 'Tis a hard thing, sir, for two people to be tied together for life against their wills."

"So I've heard," said Jock, and flicked the ash from his pipe.

"Come, come!" cried Martin Heyroun. "Enough of this! He knows, and we know, whereof we speak. In plain terms, sirrah, what is your price to consent to a divorce between yourself and the poor young lass who was forced to marry you?"

Rafe frowned, tapping his finger-tips upon the table top, and Inchcome held his breath, while they waited for an outburst.

Jock puffed his pipe in silence for a moment. "Does Mistress Hetherington ask for a divorce?" he questioned. "Rafe Heyroun, you were wont to be a true man. Answer me that question!"

"She has said no word of the matter," Rafe answered, in a voice that hinted that he would fain be clear of the business.

"She is very young and overmodest to hint of such a thing," Martin Heyroun spoke by rote what his wife had surely taught him.

Jock laughed, "If she's modest in her askings, faith, she does not take after her mother's kin!"

"This is profitless wrangling," Inchcome broke in. "Let

us be frank with each other. We that are the gentlewoman's kinsmen and friends would gladly see that most unfortunate marriage set aside. With your consent it may well be done."

"Ay," Martin Heyroun interrupted, "and we'll give you a thousand pounds for your consent. Think well upon it! A brisk young fellow like you can do much with a thousand pounds."

"A brisk young fellow like me," said Jock, unmoved, "can do more with five thousand a year."

"Then you purpose —" said Inchcome.

"I purpose," said Jock, "to keep on standing right here!" He stamped his foot on the hearth as he spoke.

In the red instant that followed, Martin Heyroun rose from his seat. "You dare defy us?" he cried. "You that are our prisoner —"

Rafe caught his father's arm, but ere he could silence the old man, Jock lifted his voice. "You forget yourself, sir," he spoke, high and sharp. "I am no man's prisoner. My ransom is paid. My parole is given. Moreover, I thank Mr. Inchcome," — he bowed quickly, mockingly, — "I have in my pocket the writing of one of the Quorum that certifies me as free as any man that stands here."

Even in the stress of controversy Inchcome smiled, in wintry fashion, at this counterstroke, but old Martin Heyroun, raging beyond Rafe's control, did not smile. He raised his voice to a shout. "You beggarly horse-boy! We'll see if there be law in the land!"

Jock wheeled upon him. "There is law in the land," he said crisply. "By that law the girl that you all neglected and despised when she was penniless was made my wife. By that law she is still my wife, now that she is an heiress — now that she has house and lands and moneys — a brave dowry for your son Philip to marry, eh, sir?" he flung the words into the face of the half-choked Martin Heyroun. "By that law

for which you clamor I am master here in right of my wife. By law I hold the inheritance and I hold the girl, and by the splendor of God! I still will hold them both in spite of you!"

He stopped, and for a moment there was tense silence. Martin Heyroun breathed loud and audibly, and Inchcome gazed at Jock with something like approval, and Rafe Heyroun eyed the polished top of the table.

"Well," said Jock, in his more wonted tone, "you have my answer now. For the present, gentlemen, I give you good day. A pleasant journey to you, Mr. Heyroun! 'Tis hard on three o'clock. Mr. Inchcome, there will be legal matters wherein I shall need your good offices, but not to-day. Rafe Heyroun, will you give me one moment now?"

The two older men took their dismissal, Martin Heyroun with an aggressive effort to bear himself as a conqueror, Inchcome with the cool resignation of a legal instrument that accepted an inevitable, and not wholly displeasing, change of masters. They left the hall, and the moment they were gone, Jock sent his pipe crashing to the hearth, and coming to the table, flung himself into the nearest chair. There he sat with his forehead resting on his hand and his face half hidden.

"Rafe Heyroun," said he, "you have done me hitherto much kindness. I had not looked to see you make one with them."

"I had not done so, be sure," Rafe answered, "had your wife been your wife other than in name."

Jock flung back his head and showed a stricken face that startled Rafe. "You had no right!" he said, breathing heavily. "If we are to part as friends, sir — and Heaven knows that such is my wish! — we were best part now for a little time."

So Rafe shook Jock's hand — in that he would not be

denied — and went his way, and Jock was left, victor, alone in the house where he was master, alone with his wife. He was eager to speak with Althea, to what purpose he scarcely knew, but he was reluctant to seek her without her bidding. Instead he summoned the old steward, and in the little study that had been the dead Philip Heyroun's, spent the afternoon in learning the extent of his immediate possessions — what store was in barns and garner, what servants called him master, what order it would be his part to keep in the house of Graystones. At first, in the tingling sense of triumph that was on him, he felt little more than the joy of ownership, but as the afternoon waned he felt more and more insistently the hope that somehow, by some happy chance, he might receive a word that would call him to Althea's side.

It was not till supper-time that Jock saw Althea, and then he saw her to little comfort. Alone at the table which they had hitherto seen thronged, they ate their meal in what was for both of them a very agony of troubled silence.

"It seems strange to eat here, our two selves alone," Althea broke out in desperation.

He reddened as at a reproach. "Are you sorry for that your aunt is gone?" he asked.

"Nay, she was a tiresome woman and sought to cozen me. As if I could forget how spitefully of old she treated me!"

Althea spoke from her heart, but Jock, in the weariness of reaction, saw everything awry. Gloomily he wondered if the girl spoke the truth or spoke to please the husband forced upon her. Was there ground, perhaps, for some of the passionate pleadings that Mistress Henrietta had uttered in her niece's behalf?

So tired, so disheartened Jock felt, that he let his mood show in his face, and noting this, when they rose from their disconsolate meal, Althea, in her pity and anxiety, took cour-

age. She went to him where he stood on the hearth, almost as she would have sought him in the days when they trudged the highway.

"You are weary, Jock," she said. "You must cease to be troubled, now that we are in haven."

He gave her a look that she did not fathom. As in the days at Claybourne, when he had found her sisterly kindness torture, he winced at the sisterly solicitude in her voice. He wanted to kiss her. He wanted, with latent savagery, to strike her that she came to him in no other wise, and then inwardly he cursed himself and pitied her. Poor little girl, who dutifully strove to make the best of a bad matter! He took her hand and kissed it.

"A little more, and I shall indeed cease to take thought for us both," he said. "But for now — will you leave me, dear? I must be alone."

He watched till her candle twinkled out of sight in the gloom of the gallery, and then he sat down in the great chair, the master's chair, at the table, with his face to the fire that burned upon the hearth that now was his. The wordy warfare of that afternoon seemed in that hour as far behind him as the earlier scenes of violence and hate and wrong in which, in that same spot, he had borne a part. A little wearied, but quiet again and steady with his old sense of planning for the next thing, he sat and thought.

Almost at the outset, with his former clearness of vision, he realized what he had taken time to realize, that here were none concerned save Althea and himself. The Heyrouns who had stirred him to conflict with their insults, on whom he had avenged himself, holding to what he had won, he put out of the question. Between Althea and himself, he sought to find and do the thing that was right.

Moments of wavering resolution, of battling desires, he lived through in that hour. It were a fine thing, the prac-

tical part in him cried out, to be master of that great estate, to be the husband, even as in his boyish dreams he had planned, of a rich heiress. He could do much with that fortune, in the shire, in the country itself, perhaps. He tingled with the sense of endless power. At one and twenty, penniless and unfriended, he had yet contrived to accomplish something. He knew himself master of his soldier's craft, and master of the knowledge of himself. Ten years hence, with that fortune, with the friends and alliances that he might win, whither might he not have attained? Pinnacle by pinnacle he reared his air castles of ambition for himself, for the sons of his blood that should succeed him, and he dashed all to earth with a bitter cry.

"God! If I did not love her!"

If it were any other girl cast thus into his arms, with such a fortune, he knew that his way were easy. After all, he would be as good a husband, as faithful, as indulgent, as courteous as the run of men. But this girl, of all the world, was the girl he loved. It were torture to live beside her day by day, yet barred from her love, to watch her patient effort to give from duty what she, in her perfect honesty, could give only of free will. With change of mood, he cursed the fortune. If only it were between them as it had been at Claybourne! If she were still the little penniless lass without a friend save him, somehow, with God's help, he would have won her to love him.

But now — well, he must face the hard facts. There was the fortune, which he would not possess without the girl's love. There was the girl, whose love he could not win while she held that fortune. He laughed, albeit sadly, at the perverseness of his dilemma. Softened by his laughter, he began to think only of the girl, and on the sudden he saw aright. Poor little lass! The one course for the man that loved her truly was to leave her free. That by so doing he would please

the Heyrouns, made no difference. It was her happiness for which he planned. The matter of divorce was hateful, but it might be so handled as to do her little scath. In a year or two she would have forgotten, and she was so young, and so dear, no doubt the right man would come to wed her.

"But Heaven forbid that ever I meet with him!" Jock muttered.

Now that he knew what was to do, he went about it swiftly. He called for ink and pen and paper, and taking in this a hint from Tevery, set himself to write a letter which should be given to Althea after he was gone. For both their sakes, he would not venture a spoken farewell. Two letters he wrote slowly, with much nibbling of the pen, and tore to fragments. Then he bethought himself, and driving his pen swiftly, wrote a few lines.

"On the morrow," he bade the steward, who came in answer to his summons, "send this letter to Mr. Heyroun at Draycote. And tell your mistress, an she ask of me, that I am called hence in haste on a matter that concerns us both."

When he had dismissed the steward, he took his cloak and his sword, his whole fortune now, he realized, and went from the house that had been his for one little day. In the stable he roused up a groom and bade saddle one of the hackneys, and when the task was done, he mounted and through the postern gate rode slowly forth into the lane that led to Heronswood. Just beyond the paddock the lane breasted a bit of steeper ground, and across the roofs of the outbuildings he could see, when he turned in his saddle, the bulk of Graystones tower against the starset sky. In one window he saw that a dim candle burned, and he knew it for the window of the great chamber where his wife lay.

So far upon his road he had still a moment to battle with himself. "But I love her!" he repeated, as if the words were a charm, the while he struggled with his own passions that he

boasted to have mastered. "For love's sake, I must leave her to the love that will one day come."

Steadied once more, he looked to the dim light in the distant window. "God keep you, dear heart!" he muttered, and with such farewell turned his back, for the last time, upon the house of Graystones.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE LAST RETURNING

ON so small a trifle as a netted purse of the value of six-pence, did Jock Hetherington's fortunes at this, the greatest crisis of his life, depend. The purse lay on the table in the chamber that Rafe Heyroun had occupied at Graystones, and Rafe never missed it till he had escorted his raging father and his tearful mother some miles upon their journey into Essex. Then, when they stopped for supper, he discovered his loss and was troubled. Valueless though it might be in another's sight, he valued the purse because it had been painfully netted for him by his small daughter Eleanor, and he was loath to lose it. On the instant he changed his plan. He would leave his parents to finish their journey alone, and would himself return to Graystones, get his purse, and push on that same evening to Draycote.

Accordingly, not five minutes after Jock had left Graystones by the postern gate, riding north, Rafe came trotting up the lane from the south, and passing through the gatehouse, drew rein in the stable-court. As it was past ten of the clock, he wondered a little to find the grooms astir, but he held it no longer his business to ask questions in that household, so he tossed his bridle to the nearest man, and, without parley, headed for the hall.

The passage thither was short, but it was long enough to give Rafe time to ask himself several disturbing questions;

First, what manner of mad man would he be thought, to rouse up a decent household at that ungodly hour, because he wanted a trifle such as the little purse would seem to another? Second, parting on such terms as he had parted with Jock, were it not better if he had stayed away from Graystones for a time? Third, and most persistent, what was the reason, masked, yet present to his consciousness, beneath the pretext of recovering the purse, that brought him thither?

Almost as soon as he set foot in the hall, Rafe got an answer to this last question, for the old steward came hastening to him, and in his hand he bore a letter. "Mr. Hetherington bade send this unto you, sir, in the morning," the steward explained. "Sure, to save twelve hours and more and spare horseflesh is good husbandry."

Rafe gazed upon the letter. "Where is Mr. Hetherington?" he asked.

"Gone, sir. Rode hence a quarter hour ago," the old man answered, and asked for further commands, and getting an absent reply, went from the room.

Rafe stood alone in the hall, and for a moment half dreaded to open the letter. He was fairly startled by the aptness of his coming at that hour, and with uneasiness he recalled the stricken face that Jock had turned to him. Then, heartening himself by deliberate and wonted action, he sat down at the table, drew the candle nearer, and opening the letter, read:—

"GOOD SIR: Since our partinge I have bethoghte me, and having in mind the youthe of her to whom I am wedded and her deare and tender herte, and in what rude fashion shee was constrained to bee wife unto me whom shee doth nott affection, I holde it justice that shee have her freedome. I toke her to mee but to do her sarvice in her nede, thoughe gladly I wold have taken herr for othere cause, but of this shee knoweth not, and (I thanke God!) I can rendere her backe unto you, even as shee came unto mee. Get the divorce on what groundes may bee easiest for her. I doe submitt mee in this entirely to youre guidence, I am goeing unto Clayborn

in Cambrigschir, where you may sende your commandes unto me. I shall, of necessitey, take a horse from her stable to fitt me for the journey.

“Youre obediente sarvent

“JOK HEDDRINTONE.

“GODE SIR : Since you have been a friende unto mee, as I truely beleve, I praye you bidd her farewel as from me, for I cannott write itt, and doe you be kinde unto her and cherishe her, for nevver was there dearer woman.”

There, abruptly, the letter ended. Rafe turned the paper in his hands and frowned. At the first line, remembering Jock's face, he had felt a sharp pity for him, and then as he read on, he had asked the cynical question: What does the lad hope to gain by this throw? But now as he reviewed the letter, he saw what wrong that question did to Jock and to his own heart.

Essentially, spite of the shrewdness on which he prided himself in dealing with a foeman, Jock was honest. Rafe knew that well, and, in any case, he knew that Jock's mind was not of the audacious type that would hazard a sure advantage on the desperate chance of greater gain. If dishonest, the letter was not like Jock. If honest, it was a natural manifestation of the simplicity that more than once he had shown, boylike, in dealing with people and with circumstances to which he was not accustomed. The letter was honest, Rafe decided, and, like a boy and a lovable boy, Jock had done the mad and impossible thing that the letter set forth. In the hour of his victory he had yielded all, the estate and the girl, and for the girl's sake had left the mastery of the hard-fought field to his beaten enemies, the Heyrouns.

But it was in the hands of the black Draycote Heyroun that, at that hour, rested the responsibility for action, good or ill. In the same room that had witnessed Jock's struggle scarce an hour before, Rafe sat and fought the same battle.

For Rafe was human, and even as Jock had felt it, he felt the lust of possession.

Nimble witted, he sketched the future, conning the ways and means even more rapidly than Jock had conned them. He had but to obey Jock's instructions, signed with Jock's name. He need speak but a word to Althea, who had her share of the high temper of the Heyrouns, and she would strive with all her will to forget the man that once had been called her husband. With Inchcome's aid, with Jock's acquiescence, he could soon procure the divorce. Then, with a little tact, he who had always been kind to Althea could work his will with her. He was Heyroun of Heronswood now, a rich man, the head of the family. As a matter of course, it would be he, not his foolish, rash father who would be guardian of the young heiress. He might, as his parents instantly had planned, marry her to his brother Phil, who, as he had always done, would do his brother's bidding now, in the ordering of his wife's estate, or he might, soaring higher, make a great alliance for the girl, an alliance that should be helpful to his own ambitions.

So Rafe planned, rearing his air castles higher and higher, and then stopped, shamed, for he saw again Jock's stricken face. The boy loved Althea. That Rafe had guessed already, that he knew now, with the piteous letter spread before him. He did not wish to think in that direction, but against his will his mind strayed back along the happenings of the last weeks. His wife had sent Althea forth from Draycote, — and Jock had come to her aid, and tended her and served her, ay, and more, had delivered himself up to Wogan's brutality, only to buy her protection. His kinsfolk, while he dallied in London and forgot Althea, had shamed her and abused her and cast her forth, and again it was Jock that had stood forth to guard her; it was Jock, as he knew from Verney Claybourne, that had risked the gibbet, to win the girl

succor. Always, at every turning in the girl's pitiful little history, he met Jock Hetherington.

"Once already I did him foul wrong in my thought, when I marred his wooing there at Draycote," muttered Rafe. "Sure, I owe him something now in way of recompense. A wildfire on the rogue! Were I not a fool to have a liking unto him, I should find matters easier."

Again Rafe scanned the letter. Yes, the boy loved her, of that there was no question, and having sacrificed much for her, he now stood ready to sacrifice all. "Since you have been a friende unto mee, as I truely beleve —" Rafe caught the phrase in the postscript once again, and he smote his fist upon the table. "Word o' truth!" he almost groaned. "Since the youngster has been honest, I must for shame's sake be honest, too."

With a hunted feeling that presently his shred of Puritan conscience would take the upper hand of him, and, forbidding him to cast a fortune out at the window, would make him act for his own profit and the profit of his family, Rafe sprang to his feet, and catching up the letter and the candle, swung himself up the stairs, two steps at a time. "Let the girl decide!" he silenced grumbling conscience. "A plague upon it, let the girl herself decide!"

Without stay, he knocked at the door of the great chamber. He could not but mark that, at the sound of his heavy tread in the passage, swift steps came hurrying to the door, and through the panel he caught Althea's tremulous whisper, "Jock! Is it thou, indeed?"

"'Tis your cousin Rafe," he answered. "Open to me, child!"

He heard the bolt drawn clattering from its place, and next moment, in the frame of the doorway, Althea stood before him. She had her cloak wrapped about her; her hair was unbound, and her feet were bare. Of this disorder she

seemed unconscious. Arms crossed upon her breast and cheeks white, she fronted him.

"It is ill news — it is ill news of Jock!" she formed the words with difficulty.

"That is as it may be," Rafe answered. "Do you look upon this letter and judge for yourself."

She snatched the letter from him, and bending to the candlelight, read it through. He watched her face as she read, and watching, from his heart thanked God that he had had that night the strength to play the true man.

She dropped the letter. For his eyes she tried an instant to play the required scene of wounded pride, but her set voice broke in the effort and she buried her head in her hands with a long wail: "He has left me! Oh, Jock! My Jock!"

Rafe caught her in his arms and put her into the nearest chair, where she sat with head drooping and her hair fallen about her face, and fought for self-mastery, and fought in vain.

"Then it is true that you do love this lad Hetherington?" Rafe asked.

"Ah, God knows I do!" sobbed Althea.

Rafe's dark eyes twinkled. "Piously spoke!" said he, "but, my child, were it not more to the purpose if Jock Hetherington knew it?"

For a moment she looked at him in blank amazement. Then she sprang to her feet and caught him by the arm. "Cousin Rafe! Rafe! What is it that you mean? Oh, dear Rafe! Do you mean that he loves me?"

So quickly had the tragedy turned to comedy that, in his own despite, Rafe laughed. "A man does not write in such fashion, child, nor yield up so much unless he love a woman. What have you done to the lad that he holds you are not affectioned unto him?"

She hung her head. "He said — he said our marriage was

an expedient unless I willed it otherwise — and I — and I — When I did not know he loved me — I durst not say the word. I pray you, do not laugh at me, kinsman! I was so fain to believe he loved me — that I dared not believe it — and then — and then —” She broke down at that point, poor child! “Oh, if my mother had but lived, she would have understood!” she cried with fresh weeping.

Rafe patted her head. “Come, come!” said he. “In a scant ten years my own Nell will be telling me just such tales.” He said it, half laughing, to cheer her, but when once he had spoken the words, he felt their sense strike home, and thinking on his own little daughter, he gave thanks very humbly that he had dealt fairly by this older lass. “We’ll fetch Yorkshire back to you,” he promised in a voice that of a sudden grew tender. “He cannot have ridden far.”

Said Althea, with a promptness of resolution that became a Heyroun, “Then I myself will ride after him!”

“Tut, tut!” said Rafe, for now that he had done the major mischief, he was willing to let Puritan conscience be heard on a matter of propriety. “You cannot go tracing the highways for the rascal. You’re mistress of Graystones.”

“A plague upon Graystones!” said Althea, with spirit. “Ere ever I was mistress of Graystones, I was Jock Hetherington’s wife. Get you gone to the stables, cousin, and bid them saddle me a horse. I am going to don my clothes.”

At that hint Rafe departed in short order, but, mindful of the time that it took Isabel to don her riding gear, made no undue haste in having a horse saddled for Althea. In this he reckoned without his host, for before the last buckle was fastened Althea came running into the stableyard, clad in an old gown and cloak, and with her hair hastily bound with a ribbon. She was into her saddle and off almost in an instant, it seemed, but she had taken time for a glance into the stable.

When Rafe came up with her at the little hill in the lane, he found her half laughing, half crying.

"Did you note it?" she asked him. "He has taken the sorriest nag in all the stable — and he was in love with those horses, my poor, stupid lad!"

Rafe pondered on the divine illogicalness of Althea, in that she called Jock stupid for having much the same fears and scruples that she herself had had, but wisely he said no more than: "The better for us! If he has taken a mean horse, he will ride the slower."

With this hope to spur them, the girl and the man rode forward recklessly. By good hap the moon was now risen, so that they had clear light to aid them, while Jock, setting forth in the early evening, must have had thick darkness at the outset and so have ridden slowly. They cantered through the sleeping village of Heronswood, with a thump of hoofs on the rimy ground that caused in their wake a clanging open of casements. They swung through the fields beyond, and scattered the chill waters of a ford. They scudded through a dark reach of wood and beyond, a clear defined track, they saw the road winding across a common, and midway of the road a riderless horse, and a man dismounted beside it.

"There's our lad, for a hundred pound!" said Rafe. "Something has gone wrong with his horse's gear, for which let us praise Heaven!"

They rode a little nearer, and then, from the dismounted rider, came a suspicious hail. "Who goes there?" The voice was Jock's voice, and his suspicion, considering his own behavior on Claybourne common, was natural.

"Friends!" Rafe called back, and on impulse reined in his horse. "I go now to Draycote. Give you good night, Althea."

Said Althea, with hand outstretched: "Rafe, I shall never

forget this. Will you" — she faltered — "will you bear my dear love unto Isabel?"

Rafe kissed her hand, and turned and rode away, and Althea, with sudden misgiving, now that he was gone, went forward at a footpace. So near had she now approached that she could recognize Jock's features, and he had recognized her.

"Althea!" he gave a low cry.

"Yes," she said, and reined in her horse beside him.

In shy, scared silence, they eyed each other. "I've been mending of my girth," he said foolishly.

"Yes, I see," she stammered; and then, taking courage, "How far do we ride this night, Jock?"

He looked at her. He recognized her gown and her cloak, the same in which she had trudged the highway with him. If she had cared enough to keep those poor rags! He went to her stirrup. "You are not going to ride with me?" he asked incredulously.

She nodded. "Oh, Jock! Wherein have I faulted or failed you that you would have gone and left me behind — I that am your wife — your wife that loves you!"

Suddenly, and the sight affrighted her, he dropped his head against her knee, like a little lad, and hid his face in the folds of her skirt. "Do you mean that?" he whispered. "You do not say that for duty or —"

"Duty?" cried Althea. "Do you think I would post six miles after any man and beg him of his love to return unto me — for duty? Jock! Oh, my love! can you not understand?" Her voice broke as she said the words. She bent and laid her arm about his neck. "Come, dear! Let us ride home."

He lifted his face at last, and caught her hands, and drew her down so that he might kiss her lips. He said no word, but in the moonlight she saw that that keen face of his was

broken and softened as she had never looked to see it and that his eyes were wet.

In silence still he mounted his horse, and side by side they rode back toward Graystones. They had passed Heronswood ere they found speech, and half shamed at their previous emotion, half conscious that soon they should have sweeter leisure for all that was to say, they talked of slight, foolish matters. Steadied to something like their wonted selves, they set foot at last in the hall at Graystones. On the table candles burned, and the fire, tended against their coming, blazed merrily, and the butler, officious in his new zeal, bustled in with a tankard of burnt wine to comfort the young mistress after her cold ride.

When the man had gone, they sat them down on the raised hearth with the tankard between them. On a common impulse they had sought that seat, and they laughed, realizing how it came to pass.

"You remember that first night?" said Althea.

"Ay," said Jock, "when you found me lying along the pantry floor in a swoon."

"And we sat on the kitchen hearth, much as we sit now," said Althea, "and ate the parson's pasty. We've come a long journey since that night, Jock."

He nodded, and then he put the tankard from its place between them, and moving nearer, laid his arm about the girl. She nestled unresisting against his shoulder. "How good the world has been to us!" she whispered.

At that moment the statement did not seem to him absurd. "We'll do good in it," he said soberly. "You've a great fortune, Althea."

"'Tis yours," she said. "You are the master of Graystones, my husband—master of all that is mine—and master of me."

"But I don't deserve you, sweetheart," he whispered.

“I that made you come out to seek me — that was such a fool — ”

“Oh, hush!” she bade. “And didn’t Rafe have to come teach me as if ’twere my hornbook, that you were truly loving me all the while!”

She spoke with her old laughter, albeit tremulous, and he kissed her, laughing, and held her close, with his cheek against her hair. Thus they sat in silence, while round them the firelight wavered on the dark walls and the vaulted roof of what was now their hall, the heart of the home that should henceforth be theirs and their children’s after them.





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